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KATHARINE PARR;

OR,

THE COURT OF HENRY VIII.

An Historical Romance.

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN OF L. MÜHLBACH,

BY

JOHN RINGWOOD ATKINS.

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BOOK THE FIRST.

The Wedding Day.

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KATHARINE PARR.

CHAPTER I.

THE CHOICE OF A FATHER-CONFESSOR.

IT was in the year 1543. King Henry the Eighth of England thought himself once more the happiest and most enviable man of his realm, for he had this day once more celebrated his nuptials; and Katharine Parr, the youthful widow of Lord Latimer, had the perilous fortune of being chosen as the sixth wife of the King.

The bells pealed forth from all the towers
VOL. I. B



of London, announcing to the people that the sacred ceremony was about to commence, which should consecrate Katharine Parr as the sixth Queen of Henry the Eighth.

The ever curious and sight-loving multitude thronged the streets, and eagerly pressed forward towards the royal palace, hoping to see Katharine, when she should appear on the balcony by the side of her royal husband, to present herself to the English people as their Queen, and to receive their homage.

Undoubtedly it was a high and exalted destiny for the widow of a humble Baron to become the wife of the King of England, and to wear a royal diadem upon her brow. But Katharine Parr's heart was filled, nevertheless, with anxious foreboding; her cheeks were pale and cold, and her firmly compressed lips had scarce the power of uttering the decisive "I WILL" before the altar.

At length the sacred ceremony was over. Whereupon the two spiritual dignitaries—Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester, and Cranmer,

Archbishop of Canterbury—conducted the young spouse, conformably with court etiquette, to her apartments, in order to consecrate them, and to pray with her once more, ere the temporal festivities should begin.

Anxious and pale though she was, Katharine sustained with true royal bearing and dignity the various ceremonies of the day; and as she now, with proudly raised head and firm step, proceeded through the sumptuous apartments between the two episcopal dignitaries, nobody suspected what a heavy burden oppressed her heart, or what portentous voices were whispering in her bosom.

Accompanied by her attendants, and followed by the train of her new courtiers, she had passed through the state apartments, and now stood within the private chambers of the palace. She here dismissed her courtiers, according to the etiquette of the time, and only the two Bishops and the ladies of her suite were permitted to enter the drawing-room. Even the Bishops were not suffered

to attend her beyond this apartment. The King himself had laid down the rules of proceeding for this day, and he would have declared as a traitor any person who might have had the temerity to violate these rules in the slightest degree,—nay, perhaps have sent the offender to the scaffold.

Katharine accordingly turned, with a faint smile, to the two spiritual functionaries, and requested them to await her commands. She then beckoned to her ladies in waiting to follow her into her boudoir.

Meanwhile, the two Bishops remained alone in the drawing-room, and this peculiar juxtaposition seemed to produce upon each of them an equally unfavourable impression; for with scowling and averted looks, and as if by mutual accord, they each withdrew to opposite sides of the spacious apartment.

A long pause ensued. Nothing was heard but the monotonous strokes of the pendulum of a large and costly clock, which stood over the fireplace, and the noisy acclamations of

the multitude in the streets, who pressed forward towards the palace like a troubled sea.

Gardiner at length advanced to the window, and glanced with a peculiar and gloomy smile at the clouds, which were swept by the hurricane along the sky.

Cranmer still held aloof at the other side of the room, and, plunged in deep thought, stood contemplating the large portrait of Henry the Eighth—the work of Holbein's master hand. As he scanned this countenance, which betrayed at once so much dignity and so much ferocity—as he gazed into those eyes which looked forth with such sullen and stern severity—as he observed those lips which smiled so wantonly and withal so implacably—the prelate felt a deep sympathy for the young wife, whom he had this day devoted to such splendid wretchedness.

He reflected that he had already on former occasions, conducted two of the King's wives to the altar, and had blessed their nup-

tials; and he reflected too, that he had attended both those Queens, at a later period, when they were about to mount the scaffold.

How easily might the unenviable young wife of the King fall a victim to the same gloomy fate;—how speedily might Katharine Parr, like Anna Bullen and Katharine Howard, have to pay for a few short days of splendour by an ignominious death! A single thoughtless word—a look—a smile—might be her ruin; for the anger and the jealousy of the King were incalculable, and no punishment seemed to him, in his ferocious moods, too great for those who had offended him.

It was thoughts of this kind that occupied the mind of Archbishop Cranmer. They called forth within him feelings of pity and tenderness, and caused the dark clouds to vanish from his brow.

He even smiled now at the ill-humour he had so recently evinced, and reproached himself for having been so forgetful of his sacred

calling—for having, in short, shown so little readiness to meet his enemy in a conciliating spirit.

For Gardiner was his enemy, as Cranmer well knew. Gardiner had often enough proved this to him by deeds,—however much he had endeavoured, by words, to assure him of his friendship.

But even if Gardiner hated him, it did not follow that Cranmer must return his enmity—that he must regard as his foe the man, whom by virtue of their elevated calling on both sides, he was bound to reverence and love as his brother.

The high-minded Cranmer therefore experienced a feeling of self-reproach for his momentary ill-humour. A gentle smile played upon his calm features; and with a courteous and dignified bearing, but with a subdued cordiality, he crossed the room, and approached the Bishop of Winchester.

The latter looked at him with a sullen scowl, and, without moving from the recess in

which he stood, near the window, awaited Cranmer's approach. As Gardiner beheld the noble and ingenuous countenance before him, he felt as though he would raise his hand, and smite the face of the man, who had thus dared to enter the lists, and contest with him the palm of fame and honour. But he seasonably reflected that Cranmer was still the King's favourite, and that he must therefore be dealt with judiciously. He accordingly drove his fierce impulses back into his heart, and suffered his features to resume their wonted stern and impenetrable expression.

Cranmer now stood before him, and his clear and animated glance rested upon the sullen features of Gardiner.

"I have come to your Lordship," said Cranmer, in his mild, well-modulated voice, "to tell you that I heartily wish the Queen may choose you for her director and father-confessor, and to assure you that if she do so, I shall not feel the slightest envy or animosity on that account—Indeed I shall

perfectly understand and appreciate the circumstance, if her Majesty should select the eminent and distinguished Bishop of Winchester for her spiritual adviser; and the esteem and admiration which I now entertain for you will only become enhanced. Let me therefore confirm this assurance to your Lordship, by offering my hand."

He presented to Gardiner his hand, which the latter accepted with some hesitation, and barely touched.

"Your Grace is very generous," said Gardiner, "and I must compliment you on being an excellent diplomatist; for you would give me to understand, in a very ingenious manner, what my duty will be, in case the Queen should select you for her spiritual guide. That she will do so, indeed, you know full well as I do myself. This is therefore but a humiliation imposed upon me by etiquette, which obliges me to stand waiting here, to know if I shall be chosen or disdainfully set aside."

"Why do you view the matter in such an unfriendly manner?" said Cranmer, mildly—"Why regard it as a mark of contempt, if you should not be selected for an office to which indeed neither worth nor merit can summon you—but only the personal feeling and confidence of a young woman."

"Ah! then you admit that I shall not be chosen!" exclaimed Gardiner, with a sinister smile.

"I have already told you, my Lord, that I am wholly unacquainted with the Queen's wishes, and I believe it is known that the Archbishop of Canterbury is in the habit of speaking the truth."

"Certainly; but it is equally well known that Katharine Parr has heretofore been a zealous admirer of the Archbishop of Canterbury; and that now, when she has attained her object, and has become Queen, it will be her duty to testify her gratitude to him.

"Do you wish to insinuate by that," said Cranmer, "that I have been the instrument

of her elevation?—If so, I assure your lordship, that in this, as well as in many other matters which concern me, you are misinformed.”

“Possibly so,” replied Gardiner, coldly. “At all events, it is certain that the young Queen is an enthusiastic protector of the infamous new doctrines hatched in Germany, which are spreading like a pestilence over Europe, and bearing mischief and ruin to all Christendom. Yes, Katharine Parr, the present Queen, is favourably disposed towards the arch-heretic, against whom the Holy Father of Rome has hurled his crushing anathema : she is an adherent of the Reformation.”

“You forget,” said Cranmer, with a quiet smile, “that this anathema, has also been hurled at the head of our own King, and that it has proved as ineffective against Henry the Eighth, as against Martin Luther. I might remind you at the same time, that we no longer call the Pope of Rome, ‘Holy Father,’

and that you have yourself acknowledged the King to be the Supreme Head of the Church of England."

Gardiner turned aside his face, in order to conceal the ill-humour and rancour depicted on his countenance. He felt that he had gone too far—that he had too far betrayed the secret thoughts of his soul.

But he was not at all times able to curb the passionate impulses of his nature; and albeit, a man of the world, and a diplomatist, there still were moments when the fanatical Priest bore sway over the Courtier, and the wily Diplomatist gave way to the Ecclesiastic.

Cranmer felt compassion for Gardiner's embarrassment, and yielding to the natural kindness of his disposition, he said in a friendly tone:

"Let us not here dispute about dogmas, or attempt to decide which is most at fault, Luther or the Pope. We are here in the apartment of the young queen, and let us therefore consider for a moment what may be

the probable fate of this lady, whom God has appointed to so brilliant a destiny."

"Brilliant!" said Gardiner, with an ironical smile. "Let us first await the end of her career before we decide if it was brilliant or not. Many queens already have believed that they should find a bed of roses here, who speedily became convinced that their couch was a glowing furnace, which consumed their very bones."

"True," murmured Cranmer, with a slight shudder, "it is a perilious fate to be the wife of a king. But, even for this reason, let us not enhance the danger of her position by adding to it our hostility and ill-will. For this reason I beg of you (and for my own part I pledge my word upon the matter), whatever may be the Queen's choice, not to feel annoyed thereat, nor to seek revenge. For we all know that women are strange, unaccountable creatures in their wishes and inclinations."

"Ah! it seems you understand women tolerably well," said Gardiner, with a mali-

cious smile. "Really, if you were not the Archbishop of Canterbury, and had the King not forbidden the marriage of ecclesiastics under a severe penalty, one might suppose you had a wife yourself, and that you had learnt from your own experience the fundamental points of the female character."

Cranmer turned away, and, with a certain embarrassment, seemed to avoid the keen and sarcastic glance of Gardiner.

"It is not of me that we were speaking," said the Archbishop at length, "but of the young Queen, and I would earnestly entreat your good will on her behalf. I have seen her to-day for the first time, and have never spoken to her; but her countenance made a strong impression upon me, and her looks seemed as if they besought us both to continue stedfast friends by her side, along the thorny path which lies before her, and which five women have already trodden—only to find wretchedness and tears — ignominy and blood!"

"Katharine, too, must beware, and not abandon the right paths, as her predecessors did," exclaimed Gardiner. "Let us hope, for her own sake, that she will be prudent and watchful, and that she may be enlightened by God with a knowledge of the true faith, and not suffer herself to be led astray by the errors of ungodly heretics, but remain faithful and constant with the true believers."

"Who can say who the true believers are?" murmured Cranmer. "There are so many ways that lead to Heaven, who can tell which is the right one?"

"That which we travel!" exclaimed Gardiner, with the haughty pride of the genuine ecclesiastic. "Woe betide the Queen if she should swerve into strange paths! Woe betide her if she lend an ear to the errors which are wafted hither from Germany and from Switzerland, and if she fancy in the worldly wisdom of her heart, that she will be able to rest securely. For my part, I shall be her most zealous and devoted servant, if she is for me—

but her most implacable enemy, if against me!"

"And shall you consider it as against you, if the Queen should not choose you for her father confessor?"

"Do you wish to understand that I should consider it as for me?"

"Well then, God grant that her choice may fall upon you!" exclaimed Cranmer fervently, while he clasped his hands, and looked up towards heaven. "Poor, hapless Queen! The first proof of thy husband's love may become the prime source of thy misfortune! Why then did he leave thee the liberty of choosing thy own director—why not himself have made the choice for thee?"

And with a deep sigh, Cranmer bent his head upon his breast.

At this moment, the door of the royal closet opened, and Lady Jane, the daughter of Lord Douglas, and first Lady in Waiting to the Queen, appeared on the threshold.

The two Prelates looked towards her in

breathless silence. It was an anxious and a solemn moment—the deep significance of which they all three understood.

“Her Majesty the Queen”—said Lady Jane, in a faltering voice—“her Majesty the Queen, commands the attendance of his Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury in her closet, that he may join with her in prayer.”

“Unhappy Queen!” murmured Cranmer, as he crossed the apartment towards the royal closet. “Unhappy Queen! she has just made for herself an implacable enemy for life.”

Lady Jane waited until Cranmer had disappeared through the door, and then approaching the Bishop of Winchester with rapid steps, and bending her knee before him, said, with an accent of deep humility:

“Pardon, my Lord, pardon! My words were vain—they were powerless to shake her resolution.”

Gardiner assisted the fair postulant to rise, and said with a forced smile:

"It is well, Lady Jane, it is well. I doubt not your zeal. You are a faithful daughter of the Church, and for this she will love and reward you as a mother. Then the matter is decided—the Queen is—"

"A heretic!" whispered Lady Jane. "Woe betide her!"

"And will you be faithful and constant to me?"

"Faithful in deed and in thought, to the last drop of my blood!"

"Then we shall conquer Katharine Parr as we have conquered Katharine Howard. To the scaffold with the heretic! We have found the means of sending Katharine Howard to the block, and now, Lady Jane, you must find a way for us to lead Katharine Parr to the same destiny."

"I will undertake to do so," said Lady Jane, placidly. "She loves me and confides in me. I will betray her friendship that I may remain true to my faith."

"Then Katharine Parr is lost!" said Gardiner, aloud.

"Yes, she is lost," repeated Lord Douglas, who had just entered, and had overheard the last words of the Bishop,— "yes, she is lost, for we shall ever be her watchful and inexorable enemies. But I fear it is not prudent to utter these sentiments in the Queen's ante-room. Let us therefore abide a more seasonable opportunity. But now, my Lord, you must betake yourself to the grand audience chamber, where the whole Court is already assembled, and only awaits the King's pleasure to conduct the young Queen in solemn procession to the balcony."

Gardiner nodded a silent assent, and forthwith proceeded to the audience chamber.

Lord Douglas followed him with his daughter. "Katharine Parr is lost," he whispered in Lady Jane's ear, "and you will be the seventh wife of the King."

During this conversation in the antechamber the young Queen was on her knees before

Cranmer, and with him was addressing a prayer to heaven for prosperity and peace. Tears filled her eyes, and she felt her heart tremble within her, as if anticipating some approaching misfortune.

CHAPTER II.


THE QUEEN AND HER BOSOM FRIEND.

THIS long day of ceremonials and solemnities was at length drawing to a close, and Katharine hoped soon to be relieved from the simulated homage and the artificial smiles of her courtiers.

She had shown herself on the balcony beside her husband, in order to receive the greetings of the people, and to bow her acknowledgments. After this, the newly-appointed members of her Court moved in solemn procession before her in the Throne room ; and to each of these noble lords and ladies in turn she addressed a few affable observations as they passed along.

And this being over, she assisted her royal husband in giving audience to the deputation from the Metropolis and from the Parliament. Yet it was with an inward shudder that she heard from their lips the stereotyped congratulations, and the fulsome addresses, with which those deputies had on similar occasions greeted five of the King's former wives.

Nevertheless she succeeded in her efforts to smile and to look happy, for she knew that the gaze of the King was continually fixed upon her, and that all the noble lords and ladies who now approached her with such demonstrations of apparent humility and homage, were all of them at heart her most bitter enemies. For by her marriage with the King she had foiled the schemes, and destroyed the hopes of so many, who thought themselves better entitled to occupy the high position of a queen. She knew that those disappointed ones would never forgive her—that she, who had only yesterday been their equal, was to-day lifted



above their heads, as their Queen and mistress ; and she knew that all of them watched like spies her every word and gesture, that they might perchance be able to fabricate an accusation against her, which would seal her doom.

But still she smiled ! She smiled, although she felt that the King's jealous anger—so easily excited and so fiercely violent—hung evermore above her head like the sword of Damocles.

She smiled lest this sword should one day descend upon herself.

At length, however, all these state ceremonies and pageantries, and all these outward marks of homage and rejoicing were over ; and now the more agreeable and satisfactory part of the festivity was about to commence.

The guests had assembled at table. This was the first moment of quiet and repose which Katharine had enjoyed throughout the day. For when Henry sat down to table he ceased to be a dignified monarch or a jealous

husband—he was only the skilful epicure, the sensual gourmand; and whether the pasties were well seasoned or the pheasants savoury, were for him far more important questions, than what concerned the welfare of his people or the good of his kingdom.

After dinner, however, a novel recreation was introduced, a new species of entertainment, which at least for a time banished from Katharine's heart, all gloomy apprehensions and sinister forebodings, and which imparted to her countenance a glow of cheerful and serene enjoyment. The King had prepared a surprise for his young wife, which was at that time of a novel character. He had caused a theatre to be erected within the palace of Whitehall, on the stage of which was represented one of the comedies of Plautus, by the gentlemen of the Court.

Dramatic representations had hitherto been confined to those pieces called "Moralities" and "Mystery Plays," which were acted by the people on the occasion of certain church

festivals. Henry the Eighth was accordingly the first monarch who had a theatre established in England for secular entertainments, and who introduced what perhaps may be called "the Legitimate Drama," as distinguished from mere dramatised episodes of ecclesiastical history. As he had liberated the church from the spiritual dominion of the Pope, so he wished to render the stage free from the control of the church, and to see comedies performed of a less serious character than those which depicted the broiling of saints or the massacre of pious women.

Moreover, what need of such scenic butchery on the stage, when the King had a real performance daily exhibited? The burning of Christian martyrs and of godly-minded maidens, was a matter of such everyday occurrence under the reign of Henry the Eighth, that it no longer furnished himself or his court with an amusing entertainment.

But the representation of a Roman Comedy promised a new and piquant pleasure, and

would at least be a surprise for the young Queen. Henry therefore caused the "CURCULIO" to be acted before his wife; and whenever Katharine blushed at the obscene and scurrilous jests of the Roman Poet, the King felt highly amused, and accompanied the most indecent allusions, and the most licentious passages, with boisterous laughter and loud applause.

This entertainment too was at length over. And now Katharine was at liberty to retire with her ladies to her private apartments.

With a gracious smile, she dismissed the gentlemen of her suite, and requested her ladies, among whom was Anne Askew, the second lady of her bed-chamber, to await her commands in her dressing room. She then gave her arm to her friend, Lady Jane Douglas, and they both entered the Queen's closet.

At length she was alone—at length unwatched. The smile vanished from her lips, and an expression of deep sadness marked her features.

"Jane," she said, "shut the doors and draw the window-curtains, that no one may see or hear me,—no one but yourself, my friend, the companion of other and happier days. Alas! alas! why was I ever so ill-advised as to leave my father's quiet mansion, and go abroad into the world,—so full of snares and terrors."

She sighed and groaned deeply; and covering her face with her hands, she sank back in her chair weeping and trembling.

Lady Jane contemplated her mistress with a peculiar and sinister smile.

"She is a queen and yet she weeps," said the maid of honour, to herself. "Ah, well! how can one be a queen now-a-days and not feel unhappy."

She approached Katharine, and sitting on a stool at her feet, seized her hand, which she kissed.

"Your Majesty weeps," she said, with an insinuating tone; "Alas, I fear you are unhappy, while I, who heard with an outburst

of delight, the news of this wonderful good fortune of my friend, thought I should find her radiant with joy, as an exalted and happy Queen; and my only anxiety—my only fear, was lest the Queen should have ceased to be my friend any longer. For this reason, I urged my father to come away at once, according to your commands, and leaving Dublin to hasten hither without delay.”

Katharine removed her hand from her face, and looked at her friend with a smile of sadness.

“Well, Jane,” she said, “are you not satisfied with what you have seen? Have I not shown you, all this day, a Queen smiling in the guise of happiness—did I not wear costly robes embroidered with gold—did not my neck sparkle with brilliants, and did not a royal diadem adorn my brow, while a King sat by my side? Let this suffice for the present. You have all this day seen the Queen. Allow me now, therefore, for a few brief and happy moments, to become the woman, with lively

and sensitive feelings, who can disclose to her friend all her troubles and sorrows. Ah, Jane, if you only knew how I have longed for this hour, how I yearned for your sympathy as the only relief to this poor stricken and wounded heart;—how earnestly I besought heaven to grant me this favour, that I might once more have my Jane back with me, that she might condole with my sorrows, and that I might always have near me, one friend, at least, who could understand me, and who does not suffer herself to be dazzled by all this wretched parade and outward splen lour.”

“Unhappy Katharine!” murmured Lady Jane. “Unhappy Queen!”

Katharine started, and placed her hand, which glistened with diamonds, upon the lips of her friend.

“Pray do not address me so,” said the Queen. “Alas, that one word recalls all the terrors of the past. Queen! Does not that mean to be condemned like a criminal to the block? A death shudder passes through

my veins at the bare thought. I am the sixth queen of Henry the Eighth. I shall therefore be sent to the scaffold ; or else be covered with disgrace and turned adrift."

Once more she buried her face in her hands, and her whole frame trembled with violent emotion. She did not therefore perceive the malignant smile with which Lady Jane again contemplated her ; nor did she suspect with what secret delight her "friend" perceived her tears and her anguish.

"Well, I'm revenged at least!" thought Lady Jane, while she smoothed down the Queen's hair caressingly,—*"yes, I'm revenged. She has robbed me of a crown ; but in the golden cup which she raises to her lips, she shall find nothing but wormwood and gall. If this sixth queen does not mount the scaffold, we shall at least be able to hasten her death by a broken heart."*

She then continued aloud, "But why these fears, Katharine ? The King loves you ; the whole Court observed with what earnest and

affectionate looks the King gazed upon you to-day, and with what delight he hung upon every word you uttered. Certainly the King loves you."

Katharine grasped her hand ardently. "The King loves me," she whispered, "but still I tremble before him; nay more, I have a horror of his love. His hands are steeped in blood, and as I saw him to-day in his purple robes, I shuddered, and thought how soon my blood too would encrimson that purple."

Lady Jane smiled. "You are unwell, Katharine," said she. "This sudden good fortune has overcome you, and your excited nerves cause all sorts of horrors to spring up in your imagination—nothing more."

"No, no, Jane, these thoughts are always present to my mind, and they have never left me since the moment the King made choice of me for his wife."

"And why did you not refuse him, accordingly?" asked Lady Jane. "Why not have declined the King's suit?"

“ Ah, Jane, are you such a stranger to this court as not to know that one must either yield to the King’s wishes or die? Alas, I am envied. People call me the greatest and mightiest woman in England. But they know not that I am poorer and more powerless than the mendicant in the streets, who has at least the right of refusing her hand at her own option. For me, I dared not refuse; I had no alternative but to accept the King’s proffered hand—or die. I was unwilling to die so soon; I have still so many claims upon life, and as yet so few of them have been vouchsafed me. Alas, for my poor cheerless existence; for what has it been, but a continued series of denials and privations—of sad reminiscences and blighted hopes. It is true I have never experienced what is called misfortune; but what greater misfortune can there be than to be unhappy—than to sigh through life without a wish or a hope, and to suffer the perpetual tedium of an insipid and joyless existence in the midst of luxury and splendour.”

"You say that formerly you were not unhappy, and yet you were left an orphan?"

"I lost my mother so early that I scarcely knew her, and when my father died, I regarded it almost as a blessing, for he never acted towards me as a parent, but only as a harsh and tyrannical master."

"But then you were married?"

"Married!" said Katharine, with a sad smile. "Yes, that is to say my father sold me to an old, gouty invalid, in whose sick chamber I spent a cheerless and fearfully tedious year, until Lord Latimer made me a rich widow. People regarded that, too, as another piece of good fortune, for now I was a widow, young, rich, and independent. But what advantage was such independence to me?—it only fettered me with fresh bonds. Formerly I had been the slave of my father and of my husband, and I now became a slave to my riches: I ceased to be a sick nurse only to become the manager of my estates. That was certainly the most wearisome part of my

life, and yet I am indebted to it for my only real happiness—for it was then that I made your acquaintance, Jane : and my heart which had never experienced any more tender emotions, expanded towards you with all the warmth and eagerness of a first affection. And up to the moment that my long absent nephew re-appeared—after he had been supposed dead—and deprived me of the inheritance which properly belonged to him, my only thought had been to make your father and yourself the heirs to my property. The world condoled with me upon the loss of my wealth. But I thank God that he has relieved me of the burthen, and has brought me to London in order to see life at last—to think and feel like others, and at length to know real happiness or real misfortune.”

“ And which did you find ? ”

“ Unhappiness, Jane !—for am I not a Queen ? ”

“ But is that your only unhappiness ? ”

“ Yes, but surely that is great enough. It

condemns me to perpetual anxiety—perpetual dissimulation. It condemns me to breathe a love which I do not feel, and to suffer caresses which make me shudder, for they are but the heritage derived from five unhappy women. Oh, Jane, do you know what it is to be obliged to embrace a man who has murdered three wives and put away two others—to kiss perforce the blood-stained lips which utter vows of love with the same readiness that they pronounce a decree of death? The very thought makes the blood run cold in my veins. I shall be called a Queen, and yet I shall be doomed to tremble for my life every hour in the day, while I must conceal my anxiety and terror under the guise of happiness. I am barely five-and-twenty years old, and my heart is still the heart of a child—for it scarcely knows its own wishes. And now it is fated never to know them, for I am Henry's wife, and to love another would be to mount the scaffold. The scaffold! Look, Jane. When the King approached me and confessed his

love, and offered his hand, there suddenly rose up before me a terrible picture. It was no longer the King that I saw standing there, but the headsman! And it seemed to me as if I saw three corpses lying at his feet, and with a loud shriek, I sank unconscious on the floor. On recovering myself the King held me in his arms. He believed it was the suddenness of this unexpected honour which had overpowered me. He kissed me, and called me his bride; he did not think for a moment that I could refuse him. And, I, Jane—despise me—I was such a coward that I could not find courage for a refusal—I yielded, for I did not wish to die. It seemed to me at this moment as if life beckoned to me with a thousand joys—a thousand delights yet in store, which I had never tasted, and for which my soul thirsted as for manna in the desert. I wished to live—yes to live, at any cost—in order one day perhaps, to enjoy the sweets of love and happiness. But only think, Jane, people call me ambitious;

they say I have given my hand to Henry only because he is a King. Ah! little do they know how I shuddered inwardly at this crown. They little know that in the anguish of my heart I besought the King not to raise me to this dignity—so that I might avoid making enemies of all the ladies of his realm. They know not that I confessed my love to him, only that I might be able to add, that for love of him, I was ready to forego his suit,—that for love of him I was willing to sacrifice my own happiness for his, and that I conjured him to choose for himself a worthy wife amongst the hereditary Princesses of Europe. But Henry rejected the proposal. He wished to create a Queen, and to possess a wife, who should be his property, and whose blood he might shed as her Supreme and Sovereign Lord. His Queen I am accordingly. I have accepted my fate, and henceforth my life will be a perpetual struggle, an unceasing warfare with death; but I will at least, sell my life as dearly as possible, and the maxim which Cranmer

has suggested, shall always be my rule of conduct on the thorny path which lies before me."

"And what may that maxim be?" asked Lady Jane.

"'Be wise as the serpent, and innocent as the dove,'" replied Katharine, with a faint smile, as she dropped her head upon her bosom, and abandoned herself to painful and ominous reflections.

Lady Jane now stood opposite her, and contemplated with unmoved and stern composure the convulsed and agonised features, and the trembling frame of the young Queen, for whom all England had this day kept high festival, and who sat now so sad and woebegone before her simulated friend.

Suddenly Katharine raised her head. Her countenance had now assumed quite a different expression,—it was calm, firm, and resolute. Bending slightly forward, she extended to Lady Jane her hand, and drew her friend closer to her side.

"I have to thank you, Jane," she said, while she kissed her brow, "I have to thank you, for your presence has done me good: it has relieved me of the oppressive burden of my secret sorrow. To express one's cares freely to a friend, is the best cure for them. Henceforward you will find me more cheerful and composed. The woman has laid her griefs before you, but the Queen knows she has a task to fulfil—as difficult as it is important, and I pledge my word to perform it. The new light which has gone forth to the world shall no longer be obscured by blood and tears, and no longer shall the wise and the just be condemned like malefactors and traitors, in this unhappy land. This is the task which God has assigned me, and I swear in his presence, that I will accomplish it. Will you help me to do so, Jane?"

Lady Jane replied by a few equivocal words, which Katharine did not catch, and as the latter looked at her, she perceived with astonishment the deadly pallor which of a sudden

KATHARINE PARR.

overspread the countenance of her maid of honour.

Katharine started, and looked at her with an earnest and steadfast gaze, as if to penetrate her thoughts.

Lady Jane shrank from the inquiring and animated glance of the Queen, and cast her eyes towards the ground. Her religious zeal had for a moment overpowered her, and however much she was accustomed to conceal her thoughts and feelings, yet on this occasion, she was for the moment thrown off her guard, so as to betray her sentiments to the keen eye of her mistress.

“It is a long time since we saw each-other,” said Katharine sadly. “Three years! That is a long period in the history of a young girl’s heart. And all this time you were with your father in Dublin—at that staunchly Catholic Court—I had forgotten that. But, however your views may have altered, your heart I know is still the same, and you will always be the noble, high-minded Jane of

former years—who would never stoop to a falsehood—even though it were to bring her fortune and splendour. I therefore ask you, Jane, what religion you now profess? Do you believe in the Pope of Rome, as the sole Head of the Church, or do you adhere to the new teaching of Luther and Calvin?”

Lady Jane smiled. “Think you,” she said, “I would have ventured to appear in your presence if I still belonged to the Catholic party? Katharine Parr is hailed by the Protestants of England, as the new protectress of their imperiled doctrines; and already the priests of the Roman Church launch their anathemas against you, and execrate you as their most dangerous enemy. And yet you ask me if I am an adherent of that Church, which calumniates and condemns you? You ask me if I believe in the Pope, who has excommunicated the King—the King who is not only my sovereign and supreme ruler, but also the husband of my noble and generous Katharine. I fear your

Majesty can scarcely love me, in asking me such a question."

And as if overcome by her emotion, Lady Jane sank down at Katharine's feet, and hid her face in the ample folds of the Queen's robe.

Katharine stooped to raise her up and embrace her. Suddenly, however, she started, and a deadly paleness overspread her countenance.

"The King!" she whispered. "The King comes this way!"

CHAPTER III.

KING HENRY THE EIGHTH.

KATHARINE was not mistaken. The doors opened and the Earl Marshal appeared upon the threshold with his gold staff of office.

“His Majesty the King !” said the Marshal, in his grave and solemn tone, which filled Katharine with secret horror, as if sentence of death had just been pronounced against her.

But she constrained herself to smile, and approached the door in order to receive the King.

A heavy rolling was now heard, and along over the well-polished floor of the ante-room, came the King’s in-door equipage.

This in-door carriage consisted of a large arm-chair mounted upon wheels, which instead of horses, was drawn by men, and to which, from a kind of delicate flattery, was given the form and shape of a triumphal chariot—such as that of the victorious Roman Emperors of old—in order, whenever the King was drawn about the apartments in this manner, to maintain the agreeable illusion that he was making a triumphal march, and that it was in nowise the weight of his unwieldy limbs which compelled him to mount this quasi-imperial chariot. Henry willingly yielded to the flatteries of his courtiers, and whenever he rode about in this guise, through the gilded saloons, adorned with Venetian mirrors, which multiplied and reflected his likeness from every side, he readily lulled himself in the illusion that he was a triumphant conqueror, and wholly forgot that it was not his achievements but his corpulency which had raised him to the victor's car.

For this huge mass which filled the colossal

arm-chair—this mountain of purple-robed flesh—this lumbering and shapeless form, was Henry the Eighth,—the King of happy England.

But this unwieldy mass had a head !

A head full of dark and sinister thoughts,—a heart full of blood-thirsty and ferocious instincts. The colossal body was indeed bound to the arm-chair by its own ponderous bulk ; but the mind of its owner never rested, but hovered—as though with the eye and talons of an unclean bird of prey—over his people,—always ready to pounce upon some poor innocent dove, to drink its blood, and tear out its heart—that he might present it, still quivering, upon the altar of his sanguinary god.

The domestic chariot of the King now stopped, and Katharine hastened forward to assist her royal spouse in alighting.

Henry greeted her with a gracious nod, and ordered the pages in attendance to stand back.

“Go away !” he exclaimed, “get ye gone !

My Katharine alone shall give me her hand here, and welcome me to her bridal chamber. Away! We feel ourself this day as young and vigorous as in our best and happiest years; and the young Queen shall find that it is no feeble, tottering grey-beard who weds her, but a hale and vigorous man, whose youth has been renewed by love. Do not think, Kate, that it is from any bodily ailment that I use this carriage. No—it was only my wish to see thee, which made me eager to come the more speedily.”

He kissed her brow with a self-satisfied smile, and leaning lightly on her arm, descended from his chariot.

“Away with this carriage, and with you all!” he exclaimed. “It is our will to be left alone with this young and beautiful woman, whom my Lords the Bishops have this day made our own.”

And with a wave of his hand he dismissed the whole train of his courtiers, and Katharine was now alone with the King.

Her heart beat so violently that it made her lips tremble, and her bosom heave with emotion.

Henry perceived it, and smiled ; but it was a cold and grim smile, which made Katharine turn pale.

“ He has always the smile of a tyrant upon his lips,” she whispered to herself. “ With this same smile with which he now expresses his love for me, perhaps he yesterday signed a death warrant, or to-morrow perhaps will witness an execution.”

“ Do you love me, Kate ?” suddenly exclaimed the King, who had for a moment been contemplating her in silent thought,—
“ Tell me, Kate, do you love me ?”

Saying which, he looked with a fixed and scrutinizing gaze into her eyes, as if he would scan the secret thoughts of her heart.

Katharine met his glance with firmness, and without shrinking. She felt that the present moment was all-decisive. and would determine her whole future ; and this convic-

tion restored to her all her energy and presence of mind.

She was now no longer the timid or trembling girl, but the resolute and determined woman, who was prepared to wrestle with fate for the greatness and splendour of her existence.

"Do you love me, Kate?" repeated the King, while a cloud seemed gathering on his brow.

"I don't know," replied Katharine, with a smile which enchanted the King; for her charming features betrayed no less graceful coyness, than modest and winning reserve.

"You don't know?" repeated Henry, with surprise. "Now by God's mother, this is the first time of my life that a woman has ventured to tell me as much. You are a brave woman, Kate, to give me such an answer, and I commend you for it. I like bravery, for it is a thing I so rarely meet with. All of them tremble before me here, Kate—all! They know that I don't shrink from blood, and that,

secure in the strength of my kingdom, I can sign a death warrant or a billet-doux with equal composure."

"Oh, you are a great King !" murmured Katharine.

Henry did not notice this observation. He was plunged in one of those fits of self-contemplation, in the indulgence of which he found so much pleasure, and which generally had for their object, his own greatness and glory.

"Yes," he continued, and his eyes, (which, despite his corpulence, and his brawny countenance, remained wide open,) became fiercely animated. "Yes, they all tremble before me, for they know that I am a just and severe King, who does not spare his own blood when the punishment and expiation of crime require it; and who scourges the offender with an inexorable hand—even if he should be the nearest to his throne. Take care accordingly, Kate—take care. You see in me the avenger of God, and the judge of men. Kings wear

purple—not because it is splendid or becoming, but because it is red, like blood, and because it is the highest prerogative of Kings to be free to shed the blood of their rebellious subjects, and thereby expiate the crimes of the human race. It is thus alone that I understand a monarch's duties, and thus alone will I execute them to the end of my days. It is not the right of pardon, but that of punishment by which the sovereign is distinguished from the base herd of mankind. The thunder of heaven should be upon his lips, and the King's wrath should descend like lightning upon the heads of the guilty."

"But God is not only the angry, but also the merciful and the pardoning," said Katharine, as she leant her head timidly upon the King's shoulder.

"That is just the privilege which God enjoys above us Kings," said Henry; "that he can exercise mercy, whereas we can only punish and condemn. There must be some point in which God is superior to Kings.—

But how now, Kate,—you tremble, and that sweet smile has left your lips. Don't be afraid of me, Kate. If you are true and faithful to me, I shall always love you. And now, Katty, explain to me, what you meant by saying you don't know if you love me."

"No, your Majesty. I really don't know. How should I understand or designate a feeling which I have never yet experienced?"

"What! Never loved, Kate?" exclaimed the King, with a look of joyful astonishment.

"Never! Sire. My father treated me harshly, and never excited any sentiments in me but those of anxiety and terror."

"And your husband, child—the man who was my predecessor in your affections. Did you not love your husband, either, Kate?"

"My husband?" she asked, musingly. "It is true my father sold me to Lord Latimer, and when the priest joined our hands together, people said he was my husband. But he knew very well that I didn't love him, and

he didn't even desire that I should. He gave me his name, as a father gives his name to his daughter, and I was his daughter—an obedient and dutiful daughter, who fulfilled her duties faithfully, and tended him to his death."

"And after his death? Why years have passed since that, Kate. Tell me, I entreat you—tell me the truth—the simple truth—have you never loved any one since your husband's death?"

The King looked at her with visible anxiety, eager to learn her reply, and Katharine did not shrink from his inquiring gaze.

"Sire," she replied, with a charming smile, "until within the last few weeks, I have often lamented my own fate, and I felt as though, in despair at my cheerless and solitary life, I ought to look into my bosom to see if it contained a heart, which, cold and unmoved, had never betrayed any symptoms of its existence. Oh, Sire, I was full of anxiety and in my rash folly I even blamed heaven for having withheld from me the

noblest feelings and the happiest privilege of a woman—the faculty of loving.”

“You say it was so until within the last few weeks, Kate?” continued the King, with breathless eagerness.

“Yes, Sire, until the day when first you did me the high honour of addressing me.”

“And since then, Kate, tell me has your heart beat, you dear, amiable little dove?”

“Oh, yes, Sire ; it beats very often indeed as if it would burst. When I hear your voice, when I see your face, I feel as if a cold thrill ran through my whole frame, and drove all the blood to my heart. Indeed, my heart tells me of your approach before I have seen you ; for I then feel a peculiar nervous and choking sensation, and by that I know that you are drawing near, and that your presence will relieve me of this painful strain upon my emotions. When you are not beside me I think of you, and when I sleep I dream of you ; and now, Sire, you,

who understand all things, can tell me if you think I love you?"

"Oh, yes, yes. You love me indeed!" exclaimed Henry, to whom this sudden and joyful surprise had imparted a glow of youthful animation. Yes, Kate, I am sure you love me, and if I may believe your graceful avowal, I am also your first love. Repeat it once more, Kate. You were nothing more than a daughter to Lord Neville?"

"Nothing more, Sire!"

"And after him you had no other lover?"

"None, Sire."

"Then I am about to see realized a singular miracle. Can it be true that I have not taken a widow, but a youthful maiden, for my Queen?"

As he now looked at her with a glance of glowing and passionate affection, Katherine modestly cast down her eyes, and a deep blush suffused her beautiful countenance.

"Oh, what a precious sight is a woman who

blushes from modesty and reserve!" exclaimed the King, while he pressed Katharine violently to his breast: "what foolish, short-sighted beings we all are—even we kings! In order not to be obliged perchance to hand over my sixth wife to the scaffold, I chose, in anxious misgiving of the flagrant inconstancy of your sex, a widow for my Queen; and now this widow mocks the new decree of Parliament with a blissful avowal, and realises for me what she did not promise. Come, Kate, a kiss for all this! You have to-day opened before me a happy future, and prepared a joyful surprise, which I did not anticipate. I thank thee, Kate, and I swear by God's mother that I will never forget thee for this."

And, taking from his finger a costly ring, which he placed upon the finger of Katharine, he continued: "Let this ring be a memento of the present hour, and if ever you should present it to me with a request, I will grant it, Katy!"

He kissed her affectionately, and was about to draw her more closely to his side, when suddenly there was heard without, the roll of drums and the ringing of bells.

The King started for a moment, and relaxed his hold of Katharine. He listened. The sound of the drums continued ; and from time to time there arose in the distance the peculiar hoarse murmur which resembles the surging of a troubled sea, and which can only be produced by a vast concourse of people.

With a fierce oath the King pushed open the glass door leading to the balcony, and stepped forward.

Katharine looked after him with a half timid—half angry glance. “I have not told him at least that I love him,” she murmured. “He has interpreted my words as it pleased his vanity. Well and good. I *won't* die upon the scaffold.”

With a firm step, and with a resolute and energetic bearing, she followed the king to the balcony.

Still the roll of the drums continued, and the bells rang out from all the towers.

The night was gloomy and dull, and the dim outlines of the houses rose like so many tombs amidst the murky darkness around.

Suddenly the horizon became illumined—the sky was streaked with a dull reddish glare, which rose higher and higher, until it seemed to inflame the whole firmament with its fiery glow, which was again reflected in purple gleams upon the balcony where the royal couple stood.

Still the bells continued to peal forth, and at intervals was heard in the distance a wild, piercing yell, mingling with the uproar as of ten thousand voices.

Suddenly the King turned round to Katharine, and his face, which was lit up by the fiery reflection, as if covered by a blood-red veil, now assumed an expression of demoniac joy.

“Ah!” he exclaimed, “I now perceive what it is. You had quite confused me, you little

enchantress, and I had forgotten for the moment that I was a king, from my wish to be nothing but your lover. But now I am reminded once more of my right of punishing, as a ruler. Those are the faggots of the stake which blaze up so lustily yonder; and that shouting and uproar signifies, that my merry subjects are enjoying the comedy which I have caused to be played before them to-day—to the honour of God and of my unsailable dignity as King.”

“The Stake!” exclaimed Katharine, trembling with horror. “Does your Majesty mean that human beings are about to die a fearful and revolting death; that at the moment when you express yourself a happy and contented king, there are some of your subjects about to be condemned to a horrible martyrdom? Oh, no, your majesty will not obscure your Queen’s wedding day by such a gloomy death-cloud. You will not be so cruel as thus to dim my happiness.”

The King laughed. “No, I will not dim

it, but on the contrary I will light it up with a good blaze," he replied; and pointing to the glowing sky, he continued: "Those are our wedding torches, Kate, and they are the best and brightest I could think of, for they burn in honour of God and of the King. And yonder flame, which shoots up to the skies and bears away the souls of the heretics, will give the Almighty joyful tidings of his most faithful and devoted son, who, even on the day of his happiness, does not forget his kingly duties, but always continues to be the scourging and scathing servant of the God of Hosts."

At this moment his look was terrible. His face, which glowed with the fiery glare, wore a threatening and ferocious expression; his eyes shot forth flames, and a cold, cruel smile played round his thin, compressed lips.

"Oh, he knows no pity," murmured Katharine to herself, while she stared with a shudder of astonishment at the king, who was looking with fanatical fervour towards the flames, into

which perhaps at that moment a wretched creature was being flung at his command. "No, he knows no pity and no mercy."

Henry now turned round to her, and laying his hand gently on her shoulder, he spanned her slender neck with his fingers, whispering at the same time tender words and promises in her ear.

Katharine trembled. These caresses of the king, however harmless they might be, had in them something dismal and repulsive. It was the involuntary and instinctive touch of the executioner, who examines the neck of his victim, to fix upon the spot where he shall strike.

Thus had Anna Bullen, the king's second wife, once put her delicate fingers round her own fair neck, and said to the headsman, brought from Calais for the occasion, "I pray you strike a sure blow. You see I have but a very slender neck."

Thus had Henry clutched the neck of Katharine Howard, his fifth wife, when satisfied

of her infidelity, and when clinging to him entreatingly he flung her from him with wild imprecations. The marks of his talons were still visible on her neck when she laid it upon the block.

And now Katharine Parr must regard this ominous act as a caress, at which she is obliged to smile, and which she must needs receive with all the appearance of joy.

While thus spanning her neck, he bent his face close to her cheek, and whispered words of affection in her ear.

But Katharine paid no heed to his ardent whisperings. She saw nothing but the blood-red, fiery decree in the skies. She heard nothing but the doleful cries of the unhappy victims.

"Pardon! Pardon!" she stammered. "Oh let this day be a day of rejoicing for all your subjects. Be merciful, and if I am to believe that you really love me, grant me the first request which I shall ask you. Grant me the

lives of these unhappy victims. Mercy, Sire, Mercy !”

And as if the prayer of the Queen had found an echo, there was suddenly heard from the adjoining room a woe-stricken and despairing cry of, “Pardon, Sire, pardon !”

The King turned round angrily, and his brow assumed a severe and lowering expression. He looked enquiringly at Katharine, as though he would discover from her features, if she knew who dared to disturb their conversation. But Katharine’s face betrayed undissembled surprise. “Pardon, pardon !” repeated the voice from the adjoining apartment.

The King uttered an exclamation of anger, and retired hastily from the balcony.

CHAPTER IV.


KING BY THE WRATH OF GOD.

"WHO dares to disturb us?" exclaimed the King, returning with impetuous steps to the room. "Who dares to speak of mercy?"

"I dare it, Sire!" said a young lady, who, with pale and haggard features, now advanced in a state of fearful agitation towards the King, and flung herself at his feet.

"Maria Askew!" exclaimed Katharine, with astonishment. "What brings you here, Maria?"

"I want pardon—pardon for those unhappy beings who are suffering yonder!" cried the young maiden, with a terror-stricken look, while she pointed towards the lurid conflagra-



tion without. "I want mercy for the King himself, who so cruelly sends the noblest and the best of his subjects, like so many sheep, to the slaughter."

"Oh, Sire, have pity on this poor child!" exclaimed Katharine, turning towards the King—"pity for her enthusiasm, and youthful ardour. She is unaccustomed to these terrible scenes; she does not yet know that it is the sad duty of the King to be obliged to punish, where she would probably have mercy."

Henry smiled, but the look which he cast at the young kneeling maiden made Katharine tremble—for this look revealed a death warrant.

"Maria Askew, if I mistake not, is your second Maid of Honour?" asked the King, "and it was at your express wish that she took this position?"

"Yes, Sire."

"You knew her therefore?"

"No, Sire. I saw her a few days since for

the first time. But her appearance and manner quite won my good opinion, and I feel that I shall love her as a friend ; be therefore indulgent, sire."

But the King still continued in moody thought, and Katharine's answer by no means satisfied him.

"Then why did you interest yourself for this young lady if you did not know her?"

"She had been so strongly recommended to me."

"Who did so?"

Katharine hesitated for a moment, she felt that in her zeal she had perhaps gone too far, and that, probably, it was incautious on her part to have told him the whole truth. But the king's firm and penetrating glance rested upon her, and she remembered that he had, only this evening, strictly and solemnly enjoined her always to tell him the truth. Besides, it was no secret at Court, who the protector of this young maiden was, and who had been the means of her receiving the place of

one of the Queen's maids of honour—a position which so many noble families had sought in vain to procure for their own daughters.

“Who recommended this lady to you?” repeated the king, while his growing ire already began to flush his face and make his voice tremble.

“It was Archbishop Cranmer that did so, Siré,” replied Katharine, raising her eyes towards the king with a most captivating smile.

At this moment was heard, from without, the roll of drums, which, however, was drowned by fearful shrieks of agony and cries of anguish. The flames now rose higher and higher, and in their fierce and murderous fury illuminated the skies all around.

Maria Askew, who during the colloquy of the royal pair had stood aloof in respectful silence, now felt herself overpowered by this fearful sight, and deprived of her remaining presence of mind.

“Merciful God!” she exclaimed, trembling as if with an inward shudder, while her hands

were extended beseechingly towards the King, "Do you not hear the cries of those unhappy victims? I conjure you, sire, as you shall remember the hour of your death, and the day of judgment, to have mercy upon those wretched beings. At least do not suffer them to be flung alive into the flames. Oh, spare them, Sire, from this fearful martyrdom!"

Henry cast an angry glance at the prostrate girl, and strode past her, towards the door communicating with the ante-room, where the King's attendants awaited his commands.

He beckoned to the two Bishops, Craumer and Gardiner, to approach, and commanded the servants to throw the doors of the apartment wide open.

The scene now presented a strange and animated spectacle, and the Queen's chamber, previously so still, became of a sudden the theatre of a great drama, which would probably end in blood. The principal personages of this drama were now assembled in the small

but luxuriously decorated sleeping apartment of the Queen.

The King stood in the centre of the room, attired in his gold-embroidered robes, and covered with precious stones, which blazed resplendent with the light from the chandelier. Beside him was the young Queen, whose beautiful and amiable countenance was turned towards the King with a look of the deepest anxiety, and who strove to read in the stern and glowering features of her royal husband, the issue of this scene.

At a short distance from the Queen still knelt the youthful Maria Askew, with her face bathed in tears, which she concealed with her hands;—whilst in the back ground were the Bishops, who contemplated the spectacle before them with grave and unmoved composure. Through the open doors of the adjoining apartment were seen the eagerly strained features of a host of courtiers crowded together at the door way, whilst on

the opposite side, through the open window of the balcony, might be seen the glowing skies—while the sound of bells and drums, mingling with the yells of the populace and the shrieks of woe and despair, resounded along the air.

A deep silence ensued, and when the King spoke, the tones of his voice were so harsh and chilling that an involuntary shudder ran through all those around him.

“My Lords of Canterbury and Winchester,” said the King, “we have summoned you, in order that by the force of your prayers, and the wisdom of your speech, ye may rescue this young maiden from the devil, who, without doubt, has power over her, for she dares to accuse her King of cruelty and injustice.”

The Bishops approached the prostrate girl; they each of them stooped down and laid their hands upon her shoulder—but each with a very different expression of countenance.

That of Cranmer was mild, but resolute,

and a compassionate and encouraging smile played around his lips.

Gardiner's features, on the contrary, betrayed an expression of cruel and cold-blooded irony, and the smile which sat upon his large gaping mouth, was that of the exultant and pitiless priest, who is ready to present a victim to his deities.

"Courage, daughter—courage and discretion !" whispered Cranmer.

"The God who blesses the righteous, and who punishes and crushes the wicked, be with thee, and with us all !" said Gardiner.

But Maria Askew shrank back from his touch, and pushed his hand violently from her shoulder.

"Touch me not ! You are the executioner of those poor creatures yonder !" she exclaimed, with scornful accents, and turning once more to the King she besought him, with out-stretched hands, to have mercy upon the suffering victims.

"Mercy?" repeated the King. "Mercy? And for whom? Who are those that are yonder undergoing the penalty of their own crimes? Pray, my Lord Bishop, who are the persons who have this day been sent to the stake? What are those malefactors?"

"They are heretics, who hold the views lately brought over from Germany, and who have the hardihood to deny the supremacy of our Lord the King," said Gardiner.

"They are Catholics, who regard the Pope of Rome as the head of the Christian Church, and who recognise none other but him," said Cranmer.

"You see, my Lords!" exclaimed the King, "this girl accuses us of injustice, and yet ye say it is not heretics only who are expiating their crimes yonder, but also Catholics. It appears to me therefore, that we have acted with our usual justice and impartiality by handing over the malefactors on both sides to the hands of the executioner."

"Oh, had you seen what I have seen," cried

Maria Askew, with a shudder: "you would strain your whole energy to pronounce the single word Mercy. And this word you would make heard from this spot to that terrible place of agony and horror."


"What then did you see?" said the King, with a grim smile.

Meanwhile Maria Askew had stood erect, and her tall and slender figure presented a striking contrast to the dark forms of the Bishops on either side. Her eyes were wide open and fixed, and her noble and gentle features wore an expression of horror and dismay.

"I saw a woman being led to the scaffold," she said, "not a malefactress, but a noble lady, into whose lofty and dignified mind a thought of treason or crime had never entered, but who, true to her faith and her convictions, will not forswear the God whom she serves. As she walked through the crowd, it seemed as if a glory shone around her head, and her white hair glistened like silver. All the people

bowed before her, and even the most hardened men wept at the fate of this unhappy woman, who had outlived seventy years, and who was not suffered at length to die upon her bed, but was offered as a victim to the honour of God and of the King. But she only smiled, and gently greeted the weeping and sobbing multitude. She mounted the scaffold, as if she were going to ascend a throne to receive the homage of her subjects. Two years' confinement in a dungeon had made her cheeks pale, but it had not succeeded in dimming the fire of her eyes, or destroying the strength of her spirit; seventy years had not bowed her neck, or broken her courage. She mounted the scaffold with a firm step, and greeting the people once more, said she would pray to God for them in a better world. But when the executioner approached her and sought to bind her hands, and make her kneel down in order to lay her head upon the block, she would not suffer it, and angrily pushed him aside. 'It is only traitors and criminals that lay their heads upon

the block !' she exclaimed, with a loud voice. 'It is not for me to do so, and as long as I have breath in my body, I will not submit myself to your bloodthirsty laws. Take my life therefore, if you can.' And now began a scene which filled the heart of every spectator with horror and consternation. The Countess ran about the scaffold like a poor hunted deer worried by the hounds; her white hair fluttered in the wind, and her dark robes of death swept around her figure like a murky cloud; while the headsman in his blood-red garments pursued her with uplifted axe—endeavouring to aim his deadly blow—which she sought to evade. But at length her resistance grew feebler. The strokes of the axe had reached her body, until she became bathed in her own blood, and grew faint from exhaustion. With a heart-rending shriek she swooned away. But by her side, likewise overcome, sank the headsman covered with perspiration. The terrible chase had lamed his arm, and exhausted his strength. Panting



and breathless, he was now unable to drag this poor bleeding and insensible woman to the block, or to lift the axe to cut off her venerable head. The crowd yelled with horror and disgust, while some wept and prayed aloud for mercy, and the High Sheriff himself could scarcely refrain from tears. He ordered that the fearful work should be delayed until the Countess and the Executioner had recovered themselves; for it was not a dying, but a living woman that was to suffer according to the sentence of the law. The Countess lay at full-length upon the scaffold, while cordials were applied to restore her. The headsman swallowed large draughts of brandy, in order to revive his strength for the work of death, while the crowd turned round to the stakes which were piled up on either side of the scaffold, and at which four other victims were about to be burned. But I fled hither to implore your Majesty for mercy. And now, Sire, behold me at your feet. There is still time.

Mercy, Sire. Mercy! for the Countess of Salisbury, the last of the Plantagenets!"

"Mercy, Sire, mercy!" repeated Katharine Parr, as weeping and trembling she clung to her husband's side.

"Mercy!" repeated Archbishop Cranmer, while the prayer was timidly and cautiously murmured by a few of the courtiers.

The King's large and flashing eyes glared with a hasty and penetrating look at the entire assemblage.

"Well, and you, my Lord Bishop Gardiner," said he, in a cold, ironical tone, "will you not beg for mercy, too—like all these faint-hearted petitioners?"

"The Almighty is a God of vengeance," said Gardiner, solemnly, "and it is written 'that they who have sinned, them will God punish, even to the third and fourth generations.'"

"And what is written shall be verified!" exclaimed the King, with a voice of thunder. "No pardon for the evil-doer—no mercy for

the guilty. The axe shall fall upon the necks of traitors, and the flames shall consume the bodies of heretics and malefactors !”

“Bethink you, Sire, of your exalted destiny,” exclaimed Maria Askew, with fervent enthusiasm. “Consider what a lofty title you have given yourself in your kingdom. You proclaim yourself as the Head of the Church, and in that character you desire to rule and govern upon earth. Be gracious, then, Sire, as you call yourself King, by the Grace of God.”

“No. I do not call myself King, by the Grace of God. I call myself King, by the wrath of God !” exclaimed Henry, raising his arm in a threatening attitude. “My office is to dispatch sinners to God, and let Him have mercy upon them above, if He will. I am the punishing judge, and I judge inexorably and without mercy. Let the condemned appeal to God, and may He pardon them ! I cannot do so, nor will I. Kings rule but to

chastise, and it is not in pity or in love, but in vengeful wrath that they resemble God."

"Then woe, woe, to you and to us all!" exclaimed Maria Askew. "Woe to yourself, King Henry, if what you say be true. For then are those men bound to the stake yonder, right in denouncing you as a tyrant—then is the Bishop of Rome right in pronouncing you a disloyal and degenerate son, and in hurling his anathemas against you. Then you know not God, who is Mercy and Love—then are you no disciple of the Redeemer, who says, 'Love your enemies, bless them that curse you.' Woe to you I say, King Henry, if this be your unhappy state of mind, if—"

"Silence, unhappy girl!" cried Katharine Parr, and drawing the young maiden violently away, she took the King's hand and pressed it to her lips.

"Sire," she murmured, with earnest fervour, "you told me just now that you loved me. Prove to me that you do so by pardon-

ing this poor young girl, and exercising forbearance towards her frenzied excitement. Prove it to me, and allow me at the same time to lead Maria Askew to her room and command her to be silent."

But the King was at this moment wholly inaccessible to any other feelings than those of anger and blood-thirsty exultation.

He repulsed Katharine with apparent ill-humour, and with his penetrating glance still fixed upon the young girl, he said with a hasty but leaden tone, "Let her alone! She shall speak herself. Let no one dare to interrupt her."

Katharine trembling with anxiety, and her feelings wounded by the harsh manner of the King, retired with a deep sigh to one of the recesses near the window.

Maria Askew had, meanwhile, been wholly unobservant of what was passing around her. She was in that state of passionate enthusiasm which excludes reflection and shrinks from no danger. At this moment she could have

walked to the stake with joyful exultation, and she almost longed for this holy martyrdom.

“Speak, Maria Askew, speak!” said the King. “Tell me if you know what the Countess has done, for whom you beg for mercy—if you know why those four men have been sent to the stake?”

“Yes. I know what it is, King Henry, by the wrath of God,” said the young maiden with impassioned earnestness. “I know well why you have condemned the noble Countess to the scaffold, and why you will shew her no mercy. She is of noble and royal blood, and Cardinal Pole is her son. You wish to punish the son through the mother, and as you cannot butcher the Cardinal, you murder his noble mother.”

“Oh, you are a very learned young lady,” cried the King, with a sneering and ironical laugh. “You seem to know my most secret thoughts and purposes. Doubtless then you are a good Catholic, since the death of

the Catholic Countess gives you such unspeakable grief. In that case, you must at least acknowledge that the other four heretics have been justly committed to the flames."

"Heretics!" said Maria, with animation. "Do you call those devoted men heretics who for their conscience and their faith have confronted an ignominious death? Oh, King Henry, woe to you if you condemn such men as heretics. They alone are the true believers—the real servants of God. They have emancipated themselves from human power, and as they have disowned the Pope on the one hand, so on the other they will not recognize you as the Head of the Church. God alone, they maintain, is the Head of His Church, and the master of their conscience, and who can, therefore, presume to call them malefactors?"

"I!" exclaimed Henry, with a voice of thunder, "I presume to do so. I say that they are heretics, that I will root them out, and will trample under foot all those who think

as they do. I say that I will pour out the blood of those criminals, and will prepare punishments for them, which shall make humanity shudder and tremble. God will reveal himself through me in fire and blood. He has put the sword of vengeance into my hand, and I shall wield it to His honour, and, like St. George, I will crush the dragon of heresy under my feet."

And lifting up his inflamed and haughty countenance, and rolling his fierce and blood-shot eyes, he continued: "Hear it all ye who are here present;—No mercy for heretics, no pardon for Catholics. I am he alone whom our Lord God has chosen and consecrated as his sovereign executioner. I am the High Priest of the Church, and who denies me denies God. Whoever has the temerity to bow to any other head of the church, is a worshipper of Baal and kneels to an idol. Kneel ye all down, therefore, and do homage in my person to that God whose vicar on earth I am, and who reveals himself through

me, in his supreme and terrible majesty. Kneel down, I say, for I am the sole Head of the Church, and the High Priest of the Most High!"

And suddenly, as if touched by an electric shock, all those proud nobles—all those ladies sparkling with diamonds, and even the two Bishops and the Queen, fell upon their knees on the floor.

The King feasted his eyes for a moment upon this spectacle of abasement, and with beaming looks, and with a triumphant smile, he glanced around at this assembly of the noblest of the land—thus humbled in his presence.

Suddenly his eye rested upon Maria Askew.

She alone had not bent her knee, but stood proudly erect, like the King himself, in the midst of the prostrate courtiers.

A dark cloud gathered on the King's brow.

"You do not obey my command?" he asked.

She shook her head, and looked at him

with a firm and penetrating glance. "No," she replied, "like those victims yonder, whose last death-shriek has reached us—like them, I say, to God alone belongs honour and worship—He alone is the Head of his Church. If you ask me to kneel before you as my King I will do so, but I will not bow before you as the Head of the Holy Church."

A murmur of amazement ran through the assembly, and every eye was turned with consternation and astonishment towards the daring young damsel, who with a wrapt and beaming countenance stood confronting the King.

At a signal from Henry, the kneeling courtiers arose, and in breathless silence awaited the terrible scene that was approaching.

A pause ensued. The King himself was panting for breath, and required a moment to revive himself and collect his faculties.

Not, indeed, that anger and passion had deprived him of speech. He was neither angry

nor passionate, and it was only a sentiment of inward exultation that obstructed his breathing; exultation at having found another victim with which he could allay his thirst for blood—over whose torments he could gloat, and whose death-sighs he could greedily inhale.

The King never looked more serene or cheerful than when he had signed a death-warrant. For then he felt himself in the full enjoyment of sovereign power—as the arbiter of life and death over millions of his fellow beings, and this feeling afforded him a grateful and lofty consciousness of his own dignity.

Accordingly, when he now turned to Maria Askew his countenance was calm and serene, and his voice cordial—almost affectionate.

“Maria Askew,” he said, “do you know that the words you have just uttered make you guilty of high treason?”

“I know it, Sire.”

“And you know the punishment that awaits traitors?”

“Death. I am aware.”


"Death by fire!" said the King, with quiet composure.

A subdued murmur spread through the assembly. Only one voice ventured to utter the word mercy.

It was Katharine—the King's wife, who pronounced this single word. She stepped forward. She wished to hasten to the King, and once more implore him for mercy and pardon. But she felt herself gently held back. Archbishop Cranmer stood beside her, and looked at her with an expression of earnest entreaty.

"Calmness and discretion," he murmured. "You will not be able to save her—she is lost. Think of yourself, and of the pure and holy religion whose protectress you are. Preserve yourself to the church and for the sake of your fellow-believers."

"And must she die?" asked Katharine, her eyes filled with tears, as she looked across towards this poor, tender girl, who with a smile of resignation stood before the King.



"We may yet perhaps be able to save her, but now is not the time. Any opposition would only tend to aggravate the King, and might perhaps impel him to throw the unhappy damsel into the flames forthwith. Let us therefore be silent."

"Yes, we must be silent," murmured Katharine, with a shudder, as she withdrew once more to the recess near the window.


"The stake awaits you, Maria Askew," repeated the King. "No mercy for the traitress who dares to calumniate and condemn her King."

CHAPTER V.

THE RIVALS.

AT the moment that the King, with a voice of triumph, had pronounced the doom of Maria Askew, one of the King's gentlemen appeared at the door of the royal apartment, and approached Henry.

This was a young man of noble and imposing mien, whose proud bearing contrasted strongly with the submissive and shrinking attitude of the other courtiers. His tall and slender figure was encased in a gold-embroidered coat of mail; from his shoulders hung a velvet mantle, bearing a prince's coronet—while his head, adorned



with dark, flowing locks, was surmounted by a close-fitting gold-lace cap, from which a long white plume descended to his shoulders. His fine profile marked at once the type of aristocratic beauty; his cheeks were of a pure, transparent paleness; and around his slightly parted lips played a smile, half listless and half supercilious. The high arched brow, and the finely chiseled aquiline nose gave to his countenance an expression at once daring and thoughtful. The eyes alone did not correspond with the other features;—they were neither listless like the mouth, nor thoughtful like the brow. All the fire—all the uncurbed and haughty passion of youth, shone forth from those dark lustrous orbs. Had those eyes been closed one might have taken him for a *blasé* aristocrat, who despised the world at large; but when his keen and ever-ardent glance was revealed, it bespoke at once the young man, full of daring courage and ambitious thoughts—full of passionate enthusiasm and unbounded pride.

He approached the King, as above stated, and bending on one knee before him, said, with a full and well-toned voice, "Pardon, Sire, pardon!"

The King retreated a few steps in astonishment, and looked with amazement at the daring speaker.

"Thomas Seymour!" he said. "Thomas, thou art then come back, and thy first act is again one of indiscretion and foolhardy enterprise."

The young man smiled.

"Yes, I am come back," he replied. "That is, I have had a good sea-fight with the Scots, and have taken from them four ships of war. With these I hastened hither in order to offer them as a wedding present to my Lord the King; and just as I entered the ante-room I heard your voice, which was pronouncing a sentence of death. And was it not natural that I who brought your Majesty news of a victory, should have the courage to utter a petition for mercy, for which, as it would seem, none of

the noble gentlemen present could summon resolution."

"Ah!" said the King, breathing with greater freedom, "then you didn't even know for whom or for what you were sueing for mercy?"

"Pardon me, Sire," said the young man, while his glance was directed with an expression of contempt at the whole assembly. "Pardon me. I saw at once who the condemned person must be, for I saw this young maiden standing alone and abandoned by all, as if plague-stricken, in the midst of this brave and noble company; and you are aware, sire, that it is by this sign we recognise those who are condemned, or who have fallen into disgrace at Court—that everybody shuns them. No one has the courage to touch such lepers—even with the ends of his fingers."

The King smiled.


"Thomas Seymour, Lord Sudley, you are now, as ever, thoughtless and hasty. You sue for mercy without even inquiring if the object of your suit be worthy of pardon or not."

"But I see she is a woman," said the undaunted young man. "A woman is always worthy of pardon, and it becomes every true knight to protect her, if it were only for the sake of offering his homage to a sex so beautiful and so helpless, and withal so noble and all-subduing. Let me therefore entreat your Majesty for pardon for this young creature."

Katharine had listened to the young Sudley with a beating heart, and with glowing cheeks. It was the first time she had seen him, and yet she already felt towards him a lively interest and an almost affectionate solicitude.

"He will ruin himself," she murmured, "he will not save Maria Askew, but will only bring mischief upon himself. Oh, God, take pity upon my sad and suffering heart!"

She now fixed her anxious looks upon the King, firmly resolved to exercise her influence in favour of the Earl who had so nobly come to the rescue of an innocent woman—in case he too should be threatened by the anger of her



husband. But to her surprise, Henry's features were perfectly calm and serene.

Like the wild bird of prey, which following its instinct, seeks for its bloody spoil only so long as it is hungry ; like this bird Henry felt his appetite appeased for one day. Yonder still blazed the fires in which four heretics had just been burnt, and beside it stood the scaffold on which the Countess of Salisbury had just been butchered ; and now at the present moment he had already found another victim. Besides, Thomas Seymour had always been his favourite. His temerity, his cheerfulness, and his energy had always imposed upon the King, and, moreover, he strongly resembled his sister, the beautiful Jane Seymour, Henry's third wife.

"I cannot grant you this request," said the King. "Justice must not be checked in its course, and when justice has condemned, mercy must not belie the decree. Besides, it was the judgment of your King, which pronounced the sentence. You have therefore done wrong in a double sense ; for not only did you pray

for mercy, but you even accuse the noble gentlemen here present. If the case of this girl were a just one, think you she would not have found a knight to take her part?"

"Yes, that I verily believe," said the young Earl, with a laugh. "The sun of your favour has already turned aside from this poor maiden, and therefore the Cavaliers of your Court no longer see the form that is shrouded in darkness."

"You are in error; my lord, I have seen her," suddenly exclaimed a voice, and a second Cavalier advanced from the ante-chamber into the royal apartment. He approached the King, and bending on his knee before him, said in a low, but firm tone:

"I too, Sire, beg for mercy for Maria Askew."

At this moment was heard a faint scream from the side on which the ladies stood, and the pale and terrified countenance of Lady Jane Douglas was raised for an instant above the heads of the other ladies around her.

But this exclamation passed unobserved. All eyes were directed towards the group in the centre of the room—all looked with strained eagerness at the King, and at the two young men who dared to intercede for one whom the King had condemned.

“Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey!” exclaimed the King, and now an expression of anger was depicted in his countenance. “How is this—do you, too, venture to intercede for this girl—will you not allow Thomas Seymour to be the most indiscreet man at my Court?”

“I will not allow him, Sire, to think that he is the most courageous,” replied the young nobleman, darting at Seymour a look of haughty defiance, which the latter returned with a smile of cold contempt.

“Oh,” said he with a sneer, “I allow you freely, my dear Lord Surrey, to follow my footsteps, on the path which I have already explored at the risk of my life. You saw that I did not lose my head in this rash enterprise—and this has doubtless emboldened you.

However, it affords a new proof of your discreet bravery, my worthy Lord Surrey, and you deserve my praise on that account."


The blood of the noble Earl mounted to his cheek; his eyes darted fire, and trembling with rage, he laid his hand upon his sword.

"Praise from Thomas Seymour is—"

"Peace!" cried the King in a tone of authority. "It shall not be said that two of the noblest Cavaliers of my court convert a day, which for you all, should be one of rejoicing, into a day of discord. I therefore command you both to be reconciled with each other. Pledge your hands, my Lords, and let your reconciliation be sincere. I, the King, command you."

The young courtiers exchanged looks of hatred, and suppressed passion, and their eyes gave expression to the words of scorn and defiance which their lips dared not utter.

The King had commanded—and however great and powerful Cavaliers they might be—the King must be obeyed.



They each, therefore, held out their hands, and muttered a few words of little meaning, which were perhaps intended as an apology, but which they did not so understand.

“And now, Sire,” said the Earl of Surrey, “I venture to repeat my request. Pardon, Sire, pardon, for Maria Askew!”

“Well, Thomas Seymour, and do you too renew your entreaties?”

“No: I give way. The Earl of Surrey protects her. I retire, for beyond doubt she is guilty; your Majesty says it, and therefore it must be so. It would ill become a Seymour to defend a person who had offended against her Sovereign.”

This new and indirect attack upon the Earl of Surrey, appeared to make a deep but varied impression upon those present. The faces of some were seen to grow pale, whilst those of others were lit up by a malicious smile. On the one side, words of menace were murmured, and on the other, expressions of concurrent approbation were uttered half aloud.

The King's brow became gloomy. The arrow which had been shot by the skilful hand of Lord Sudley had reached the mark. The King, ever suspicious and distrustful, felt his mind so much the more disturbed, at seeing that the greater part of his courtiers adhered openly to the side of Howard, and that Seymour's friends were much fewer.

"The Howards are dangerous, and I shall watch them," said the King to himself; and for the first time his eye rested, with a sinister and hostile expression, upon the noble countenance of Henry Howard.

But Thomas Seymour, who only wished to aim a blow against his old enemy of long standing, had at the same time decided the fate of Maria Askew.

It was now almost impossible to speak in her behalf—and to speak of mercy would be to share in her guilt.

Thomas Seymour had done with her, for she had made herself unworthy of his protection, as a traitress to her Sovereign.

Who would now have the hardihood to intercede for her ?

Henry Howard was the man. He repeated his prayer for mercy, for Maria Askew. But the King's brow became darker and more sullen, and the courtiers saw, with terror, the moment approaching, when his rage would crush the poor Earl of Surrey.

Amongst the ranks of the ladies, too, might be seen, here and there, faces growing pale, and many a beautiful and beaming eye was dimmed with tears, at sight of this brave and generous Cavalier, who was putting his life in jeopardy for a woman.

"He is lost !" murmured Lady Jane Douglas, and quite overpowered by her emotions, she leant against the wall for support. But she speedily recovered herself, and stood erect, while her eye flashed with resolution.


"I will endeavour to save him," she said to herself, and with a firm step she quitted the ranks of the ladies, and approached the King.

A murmur of applause ran through the assembly, and all eyes were turned, with an expression of lively satisfaction, towards Lady Jane.

They knew that she was a friend of the Queen, although not an adherent of the new doctrine; and it would therefore be very significant and very important if she should support the Earl of Surrey in his magnanimous efforts.

Lady Jane bent her proud and beautiful head before the King, and said in her clear, silvery tones :

“Sire, in the name of all women, I pray for mercy for Maria Askew—for she too is a woman. Lord Surrey has done so, because a true cavalier can never disown himself, but must ever find consolation in the noble and sacred duty of being the protector of the helpless, and those that are in danger. A true gentleman does not ask if a woman deserves his protection—it is enough that she is a woman, and needs his help. If, therefore, in the name



of all women, I thank the Earl of Surrey for the assistance which he wished to give a woman, I venture at the same time to unite my prayer with his—that it may not be said that we women are without courage, and that we dare not come to the succour of one who is in danger. I therefore beg, Sire, for pardon for Maria Askew.”

“And I too, Sire,” said the Queen, approaching the King once more—“I too would add my prayer. This day is the votive day of love—my festive day, Sire. Let love and mercy prevail therefore to-day, for my sake.” She looked at the King while she spoke, with such a love-provoking smile—her eyes had such a beaming and bliss-beguiling expression—that the King could not resist her.

In his heart, therefore, he was ready for this time to let the kingly mercy prevail; but for this purpose he required a pretext—a mediative influence. He had solemnly sworn to pardon no heretic at the Queen’s request alone—so that he dared not break his word.

"Well then," said he, after a pause. "I will grant your prayer; I will pardon Maria Askew, if she will only recall and solemnly abjure all that she has said. Are you satisfied with that, Kate?"

"Yes, I am satisfied," she replied, sadly.

"And you, Lady Jane Douglas; and you, Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey?"

"We are satisfied."

All eyes were now once more turned towards Maria Askew, who, although the assembly had been occupied concerning her, had been left unnoticed and overlooked.

She, too, had taken no part in what was passing around her, and scarcely observed it.

She stood leaning against the open window of the balcony, and gazed at the fire-glowing horizon. Her spirit was present with the suffering martyrs, for whom she offered fervent prayers to heaven, and whom, in her fevered enthusiasm, she envied for their agonising death.

Wholly absorbed by her own thoughts, she had neither heard the entreaties of those who interceded for her, nor the answer of the King.

The touch of a hand upon her shoulder aroused her from her fanatical reverie.

It was Katharine, the young Queen, who stood beside her.

"Maria Askew," she whispered, "if you value your life, obey the King's command. There is no other means of saving yourself."

She seized the hand of the young maiden, and led her to the King.

"Sire," she said, aloud, "pardon the warm and excited feelings of this poor damsel, who has witnessed an execution for the first time, and whose senses were so carried away by the scene, that she was scarcely conscious of the foolish and criminal words which she uttered in your presence. Pardon her therefore, Sire, as she will gladly and willingly recall her words."

A cry of consternation burst from Maria's

lips, and her eyes flashed wildly, while she flung the Queen away from her.

“I recall my words?” she exclaimed with a scornful smile. “Never, your Majesty, never! No, as God shall be gracious to me in the hour of death, I will not recant. True, it was the pain and the horror I felt that spoke within me, but what I said was meanwhile the truth. Horror and dismay had urged me to speak, and had constrained me to reveal the inmost feelings of my soul. No, I will not recall my words! I tell you, those who have suffered yonder as martyrs, are blessed saints, who ascend to meet their God, and in his presence to accuse their kingly executioner. Yes, they are now sainted martyrs—for Eternal Truth had enlightened their souls, and beamed more brightly upon their faces than the flames of that fire upon which the murderous hand of an unjust judge had flung them. Ah! recall my words indeed! Shall I imitate the example of Shaxton, that wretched and faithless servant of his God,

who, from fear of a temporal death, denied the everlasting truth, and, with blasphemous cowardice, forswore himself in the cause of his Redeemer?

“I tell you then, King Henry, to beware of hypocrites and perjurers—beware of thy own proud and haughty mind. The blood of the martyrs will cry to heaven against thee, and God will one day be as merciless towards thee, as thou hast been towards the noblest of thy subjects—who are His creatures. You give them over to the devouring flames, because they will not believe what the priests of Baal announce to them. You hand them over to the executioner, because they obey the truth, and are faithful disciples of their Lord and Master.”

“And you share in the sentiments of those people whom you call Martyrs,” said the King, as Maria Askew paused for a moment to take breath?

“I do.”

"Then you deny the truth of the Six Articles?"

"I do."

"You do not recognise me as the Head of the Church?"

"God alone is the Lord and Head of His Church."

A pause here ensued—a fearful and anxious pause. Every one felt that there was no hope and no pardon possible for this young maiden—that her fate was irrevocably sealed.

The King smiled.

The courtiers knew this smile, and feared it more than the foaming anger of the King.

When the King smiled in this manner he had formed a resolution, and then he no longer wavered or hesitated; the sentence of death was decreed, and his bloodthirsty spirit gloated over a new victim.

"My Lord Bishop of Winchester," said the King at length, "come hither."

Gardiner approached accordingly, and

placed himself beside Maria Askew, who regarded him with a look of scornful disdain.

“I command you in the name of the Law,” continued the King, “to seize the heretic, and hand her over to the spiritual tribunals; she is damned and lost, and shall die the death she merits!”

Gardiner laid his hand upon the shoulder of Maria Askew. “In the name of God’s law I seize you,” he said solemnly.

Not a word more was spoken. The Lord Chief Justice silently obeyed the signal of Gardiner, and touching Maria Askew with his staff, he commanded his soldiers to take her away.

Maria Askew held out her hands with a smile, and with a firm and dignified bearing, left the room surrounded by the soldiers, and followed by the Bishop of Winchester and the Lord Chief Justice. The courtiers had opened a passage for Maria Askew and her attendants. Their ranks now closed again, like the waves of the sea, when they have engulfed a dead body committed to the deep.

Maria Askew was for them all as a corpse—as one buried. The waves had closed above her, and all was again smiling and serene as before.

The King gave his hand to his young Wife, and bending close to her, whispered words in her ear, which were not heard by the assembly, but which made her tremble while the colour mounted to her cheeks. The King, who perceived it, laughed and imprinted a kiss upon her brow; and then turning to his courtiers he said, with a gracious bow :

“Now, my Lords and Gentlemen, we will dismiss you, and say good night. The festivities are over and we need rest.”

“Forget not the Princess Elizabeth,” whispered Cranmer, as he took his leave of Katharine, and pressed her hand to his lips.

“No; I will not forget her,” murmured Katharine; and with a trembling heart, and with feelings of inward anxiety she saw them all depart, and herself left alone with the King.

CHAPTER VI.

INTERCESSION.

“AND now, Kate,” said the King, when all the company had departed, and he was once more alone with her—“now, Kate, we will forget everything but that we love each other.

He embraced her and pressed her passionately to his breast. She leant her head gently upon his shoulder, and lay in that posture like a crushed flower, wholly overcome and without the power of volition.

“How now, sweetheart—you don’t kiss me, Kate?” said Henry smiling. “I suppose you are angry with me still for not having granted your first request? But what would you have,

child? How should I keep the purple of my robes ever fresh and brilliant, if I did not dye them anew, from time to time, in the blood of evil-doers. The King who punishes and destroys can alone claim the title—and trembling human nature will respect him the more for it. Mankind despise a faint-hearted and forgiving Monarch, and laugh to scorn his merciful weakness. Bah! they are miserable and pitiful creatures; they esteem only those who make them quail with terror—who daily make them feel the lash, and occasionally scourge a few of them to death. Look at me, Kate. Is there a King in Europe who has reigned longer or more successfully than I have done—or whom his people love more, or more strictly obey? The reason of this is, that I have already signed more than two hundred death warrants.”

“Oh, you say you love me,” murmured Katharine, “and yet when you are beside me you speak only of blood and of death.”

The King laughed. "You are right, Kate," said he, "but believe me there are other thoughts that slumber in my bosom, and if you could only look into it, you would not accuse me of coldness or want of love. Yes, Kate, I love my own virgin Bride truly and tenderly, and as a test thereof you may ask me for any favour you wish. Yes, Kate, ask me for some favour, and whatever it may be, I give you my royal word, your favour shall be granted. Now, Kate, just think what can give you most happiness. Do you wish for jewels or a mansion by the sea-side. Would you like fine horses—or has any one perchance offended you, whose head you would have? If that be so, Kate, a nod from me and it shall fall at your feet. I am absolute and all-mighty, and there is no one so spotless or innocent that my will cannot find a crime against him, which shall cost him his head. Speak, therefore, sweetheart, what is it would make your heart rejoice?"

Katharine smiled, despite her inward aversion and horror.

"Sire," she replied, "you have already given me so many jewels, that they glitter upon me like the stars of night. Were you to present me with a mansion by the sea-side, that would be to banish me from your presence at Whitehall; I will therefore have no private residence for myself. I only wish to dwell with you in your palaces, and the abode of my king shall also be mine."

"Well and wisely spoken, Kate," said the king. "I shall remember these words, if ever your enemies should attempt to conduct you to any other residence than the one which your king inhabits with you. The Tower you know is a residence too, Kate, but I give you my royal word that you shall never be its inmate. But you want no jewels—no palaces! Then it is the head of some individual you want me to give you?"

"Yes, Sire; it is the head of an individual."

“Ah! I had guessed as much,” said the king, with a laugh. “Well then speak, my little blood-thirsty queen. What head do you desire. Who is to lay it upon the block?”

“Sire, I certainly begged of you the head of an individual,” said Katharine, with a soft insinuating tone, “but not that such head should fall, but be exalted. I beg for the life of an individual—not indeed to destroy it, but to fill it with joy and happiness. I don’t seek to cast any one into danger, but to restore a dear and beloved person to the freedom, the happiness, and splendour which are her due. You have allowed me, Sire, to ask a favour for myself. Well then, I entreat you to recall the Princess Elizabeth to your Court. Let her live with us at Whitehall. Suffer her to be always near me, and to share with me my felicity and splendour. Only yesterday, Sire, the Princess Elizabeth was raised far above me in rank, and if your all-ruling grace and power have elevated me above the other ladies of your realm, then I may venture to-day to

love the Princess Elizabeth, as my dearest friend and sister. Grant me this favour, Sire. Allow the Princess to live with us at Whitehall, and to share in the honours which are due to her."

The King seemed to hesitate for a moment. But his placid and smiling features indicated that the request of his young wife had not displeased him. A convulsive emotion was visible in his countenance, and for a moment his eyes were filled with tears.


A pale spectral image doubtless passed at this instant before his mind, and his retrospective glance presented to his imagination the beautiful and unhappy mother of Elizabeth, whom he had condemned to a hapless and cruel death, and yet whose last word was a blessing and a greeting of love for him.

He seized Katharine's hand with emotion, and pressed it to his lips.

"Thank you, you are unselfish and magnanimous; these are rare qualities, and I shall esteem you for them. But you are also brave

and courageous; twice in one day you have besought me—for one who was condemned, and for another who had fallen into disgrace. Those who are fortunate, and who stand in my favour, have numerous friends; but I have never seen the unfortunate or banished find intercessors. But you are different from these pitiful, cringing courtiers—that fawning and trembling crowd—who fall down at my feet, and address me as if I were their Lord and Maker;—different, I say, from those wretched and contemptible creatures who call themselves my subjects, and who suffer themselves to be yoked by me, like so many beasts of burden, which are useful and subservient, only because they are too brutish to know their own strength and power. Yes, Kate, believe me, I should be a more humane and benignant king if the people whom I govern were not such abject and stupid dolts; like dogs in fact, who only become caressing and affectionate the more we chastise them. But I am glad to find, Kate, that you are different. You

knew that I had banished Elizabeth from my Court, and from my heart for ever, and yet you intercede for her ; that is noble, and I shall love you for it, Kate, and will grant your request. And in order that you may see how much I love and trust you, I will now tell you a secret. I have already long wished to have Elizabeth near me, but I felt ashamed of this weakness of mine. I have long desired to look once more into the deep intelligent eyes of my daughter, to be to her a kind and affectionate father, and in some measure to make amends to her for the severity which perhaps I showed her mother. For oftentimes, during sleepless nights, the beautiful face of Anna Bullen rises before me, and gazes at me with her mild sad looks ; and then my heart within me shudders at the sight. But I dare not confess this to anyone, lest it should be said I have repented what I have done. A king must be infallible, like God himself, and must never acknowledge by any outward act that he is only a weak, erring mortal like other




men. Wherefore I was compelled to check those feelings of paternal tenderness, which were suspected by nobody, and to appear a heartless parent, since no one would help me in this matter to become an affectionate father. Ah, those courtiers! they are so dull that they never can understand but the literal meaning of our words: of what our heart says they know nothing. But you know it, Kate; you are a woman of tact, and a generous woman to boot. Come, Kate, here is a kiss from the grateful father, and another from your husband, my charming and beautiful Queen."

CHAPTER VII.

HENRY THE EIGHTH AND HIS WIVES.

THE stillness of night had now succeeded to the commotions of the day, and after so much excitement, festivity, and rejoicing, a deep repose reigned in the Palace of Whitehall and throughout London. The happy subjects of King Henry might, for a few hours at least, remain undisturbed in their homes; and, under the protection of bolt and bar, might sleep and dream away the night, or else betake themselves to their devotional exercises, on account of which they had perhaps been denounced during the day. For a few hours they might yield to the sweet and blissful dream that they were



free men, untrammelled in their faith and in their thoughts—for the King slept; and Gardiner, too, and the Lord Chancellor had closed their murder-strained, ever-watchful eyes, and rested a little from their office, as the King's myrmidons and christian blood-hounds.

And as the King slept, so slept also the inmates of the court, and rested from the festivities of the royal wedding-day; which, in pomp and splendour had far exceeded those of the five previous marriages.

Meanwhile, it seemed as though all the court officials had not followed the King's example in betaking themselves to repose. For, close to the chamber of the royal couple, one might perceive, though all the windows were shaded by rich damask curtains, that the lights were still burning, and, upon closer observation, it might be seen that a shadow fell upon the blinds from time to time.


The inmate of this chamber had not, therefore, yet gone to rest; and those must have been anxious thoughts which caused her to

pace the room, to and fro, in such restless guise.

This apartment was occupied by Lady Jane Douglas, the first maid of honour to the Queen. The powerful influence of Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester, had supported Katharine's wish of having once more near her the beloved friend of her earlier days ; and, without suspecting it, the Queen had assisted in bringing the schemes of the hypocritical bishop, directed against herself, nearer to their accomplishment.

For Katharine did not know what a change had taken place in her friend during the four years which the latter had been absent. She did not suspect how prejudicial a long residence at the strictly Catholic court of Dublin had been to the susceptible mind of her early companion, or how entirely it had changed her nature.

The once gay and lively Lady Jane had become a strict papist ; who, in her fanatical zeal, thought she served God when she served the



church, and rendered unconditional obedience to her spiritual teachers.

Lady Jane had therefore—thanks to the bigotry of her instructors—become a complete dissembler.

She could smile, while in her heart she secretly brooded hatred and revenge. She could kiss the lips of the friend whose destruction she had perhaps just vowed ; she could preserve an innocent and harmless mien while she observed all that was passing around her, and watched every breathing, every smile, and every motion of the eyelids.

It was accordingly a matter of great moment for Gardiner to have brought this “ friend ” of the Queen to court, and to have made of the fair disciple of Loyola an ally and a friend.

Lady Jane Douglas was alone ; and pacing the room up and down, she pondered over the incidents of the day just ended.

Now that no one observed her, she had laid aside that mild and demure mien, which

she was wont to assume. Her countenance betrayed in rapid succession all the varied feelings—whether sad, serene, impetuous or affectionate—by which she was alternately moved.

She, who had hitherto had before her eyes only the single object of serving the church, and of consecrating her whole life to this purpose—she, whose heart had hitherto been open only to ambition and devotion, felt on this day entirely new and never suspected feelings spring up within her.

A new sentiment had taken possession of her mind ; the woman in her nature was aroused, and knocked impetuously at her heart, around which fanaticism had formed an indurated crust.

She had endeavoured to collect herself by prayer, and to fill her mind so completely with thoughts of God and of the church, that no earthly wish or desire might find a place in her heart. Yet, evermore, the noble countenance of Henry Howard would rise before

her inward vision, evermore she thought she heard his earnest and melodious voice, whose magic tones made her heart beat and tremble.

At first she had struggled against this pleasing phantasy, which suggested to her such novel and singular thoughts; but at length the woman triumphed over the zealot and devotee, and sinking into a chair, she abandoned herself to her dreams and her fancy.

“Did he recognise me?” she thought to herself. “Does he still remember that, only a year since, we saw each other daily at the King’s court at Dublin?”

“But no,” she continued musingly, “he has forgotten all about it. All his thoughts were then devoted to his young wife. Ah! and she was very beautiful too—as lovely as one of the Graces! But am I not beautiful also, and have not the noblest Cavaliers paid me their homage, and sighed for me in vain? How comes it then that I am always overlooked where I fain would please? How

comes it that the two men, of all others, whose attention I have alone coveted have never shewn me the preference? I felt that I loved Henry Howard, but this love was sinful—for the Earl of Surrey was married; I therefore tore my heart away by violence and gave it to God—since the only man I could have loved did not desire me. But even heaven and devotion are insufficient to fill the heart of a woman. There was still in my bosom room for ambition, and as I could not be a happy wife, I was desirous, at least, of becoming a powerful Queen. Oh! it was all so well calculated, so skilfully arranged. Gardiner had already spoken of me to the King, and inclined him to his project, and while I was hastening hither at his summons from Dublin, this creature, Katharine Parr, comes and snatches him away from me, and overthrows all our plans. But I will never forgive her for it. I shall compel her to relinquish a position which belongs to me; and if there be no other means of doing so, she shall

mount the scaffold, as Katharine Howard did before her. I am resolved—I shall and will be Queen of England—I will—”

She suddenly broke off her monologue and listened. She thought she had heard a gentle knock at her door.

She was not mistaken; the knock was now repeated, and in a peculiar manner, as if preconcerted.

“It is my father,” said Lady Jane, and resuming once more her calm and composed mien, she proceeded to open the door.

“Ah! then you were waiting for me,” said Lord Archibald Douglas, kissing his daughter’s brow.

“Yes, I was expecting you every moment,” said Lady Jane smiling. “I knew that you would come, in order to tell me the result of your experience and observation during the past day, and to give me some rules for my future conduct.”

The earl reclined upon a sofa, and drew his daughter beside him.

"No one can hear us, I presume?"

"Not a soul. All my ladies sleep in the fourth room, and I have myself taken care to fasten the doors between us and them. And you know the ante-room through which you came is quite empty, so there is nothing to do but close the doors which lead to that and to the corridor, that we may be quite safe from any surprise.

And forthwith she hastened to close the doors of the ante-room.

"Now, my father, we are safe from every listener," said Lady Jane, as she returned and resumed her seat beside her father.

"But the walls, child—do you know if the walls too are safe? You look at me with doubt and surprise. Dear me, what an innocent, unsuspecting girl you are still. Have I not often given you the wise and prudent counsel to doubt everything, and even to distrust what you see with your own eyes. Whoever would succeed at court must first of all distrust everybody, and regard him as his

natural enemy—whom, however, for that very reason he must flatter, lest he might do injury; and whom he must embrace, until at length he can find a favourable opportunity of putting a dagger to his breast, or of holding poison to his lips. Believe neither men nor walls, Jane, for I tell you that both may seem ever so smooth outwardly, while there may be an ambush behind polished exteriors. But for the present I will presume that these walls are harmless and conceal no listeners. I do so because I know this room. Those were happy and delightful days when first I knew it. I was then young and handsome, and King Henry's sister was not yet married to the King of Scotland, and we loved each other so dearly. Ah, I could tell you wonderful stories of those happy days. I could—"

"But, my dear father," interrupted Lady Jane, secretly trembling at the prospect of listening once more to the oft repeated stories of his youthful love; "surely you have not come here at this late hour to tell me what,

you will pardon me for saying I know already quite well. Rather you were about to impart to me what your keen and experienced glance had discovered here."

"Very true," said Lord Douglas, pensively. "I know I am sometimes given to garrulity,—a sure sign that I am growing old. Certainly I am not come to speak of the past, but of the present. Let us therefore talk about it. Ah, I have this day seen much and learnt much, and the result of all my observations has been, that you will yet be King Henry's seventh wife."

"Impossible, my lord!" exclaimed Lady Jane, whose countenance, against her will, assumed an expression of pleasure.

Her father perceived it. "My child," said he, "let me remark to you that you have not always a perfect command of your features. At present, for instance, you are trying to play the reserved and innocent girl, and yet your face had an expression of exultant joy. But this is only *en passant*. The chief point

is, that you will be King Henry's seventh wife. But in order to become so, you will have to be very watchful and observant. You must have a thorough knowledge of the present posture of affairs—you must study those around you incessantly—you must possess the art of impenetrable dissimulation ; and finally, and above all, you must have an accurate and fundamental knowledge of the King's character and disposition, and of the history of his reign. Do you possess this knowledge? Do you know what it means to become Henry's seventh wife, and what should be done at the outset in order to attain that position? Have you ever studied the King's character?"

"A little, perhaps, but certainly not enough. For, as you know, my lord, worldly matters do not give me so much concern as those which relate to the Holy Church to whose service I have devoted myself, and for which I would sacrifice my whole existence, with every faculty of my heart and soul, if the church

herself had not determined otherwise respecting me. Ah, my father, had it been permitted me to follow my own inclinations, I would have retired to a convent in Scotland, to devote myself to silent contemplation and pious penitential exercises, and so exclude every profane sound that might disturb my mind. But my wishes in this respect were not allowed; and by the mouth of his sacred and venerated priest, God has commanded me to remain in the world, and to take upon me the yoke of greatness and royal splendour. If, therefore, I use strenuous endeavours to become Queen, it is not because vain pomp attracts me, but solely because the True Church would find support, through me, with the weak and vacillating King; and because I should be able to lead him back once more to the only true faith."

"Very well acted!" exclaimed her father, who while she spoke had been watching with a steady gaze every motion of her countenance. "Very well acted indeed! Everything

was in perfect keeping—the play of the features, the eyes, the voice, and the gestures. Daughter, I withdraw my former criticism. You have a perfect command of yourself. But let us speak of King Henry. We will now subject him to a thorough analysis, and not a fibre of his heart, nor an atom of his brain shall we leave unscanned. We will contemplate him in his domestic, religious, and political aspects, and obtain an accurate idea of each of his peculiar characteristics, that we may be able to frame our course with him accordingly. In the first place, then, we will speak of his wives; their life and their death present excellent finger-posts for your guidance, for I won't deny that it is a difficult and a dangerous enterprise to become King Henry's wife. In order to succeed, one should have a good deal of personal courage, a cool, calculating head, and a disposition, the reverse of romantic. Do you know which of all his wives possessed these qualities the most? It was his first wife,

Katharine of Arragon. By heavens ! she was a prudent woman, and a born Queen ! Avaricious as King Henry is, he would willingly have given the brightest jewel of his crown, could he but have found in her the slightest shadow or trace of unfaithfulness. But there was absolutely no means of sending her to the scaffold, and to dispose of her by poison—why for that, he was then too virtuous and too cowardly. He bore with her therefore until she was becoming an old woman, with her hair turning grey, and beginning to look unattractive in his eyes. Scruples of conscience suddenly changed the pious good King, and as he had read in the Bible : ‘Thou shalt not wed thy sister,’ terrible qualms of conscience seized the noble and wily monarch. He fell upon his knees, smote his breast and cried, ‘I have committed a great sin ; for I have married my brother’s wife, who is my sister, but I will make atonement by undoing the criminal tie.’ Do you know, child, why he wished to undo it ?”

"Because he loved Anna Bullen," said Lady Jane smiling.

"Exactly so. Katharine had become old, and the King was still a young man, and his blood flowed like a fiery stream through his veins. But he was still somewhat virtuous, and the leading peculiarity of his whole character still undeveloped. As yet he was not blood thirsty—that is to say he had yet tasted no blood. But you will see how his thirst for blood increased with each succeeding Queen, until it has now at length become a consuming disease. Had he known at that period the byeways of falsehood and treachery, as he now does, he would have hired some slanderer who would have sworn that he had been the favoured lover of Katharine. But he was still so seeming virtuous, that he wished to satisfy his amorous propensities by ostensibly lawful means. Anna Bullen must needs therefore become his wife, in order that he might be able to love her. And for the purpose of attaining this end, he

threw down the gauntlet to the whole world, became the enemy of the pope, and rose in open rebellion against the sacred head of the church. Because the Holy Father would not sanction his divorce, the King became a godless apostate. He made himself the chief of his church, and by virtue of this character, declared his marriage with Katharine of Arragon invalid. He alleged that he had not given his inward consent to such marriage, and that it was therefore incomplete. Katharine had indeed in the Princess Mary, a living witness of the consummation of their nuptials. But what did that concern the amorous and self-willed monarch. The Princess Mary was declared illegitimate, and the Queen was henceforward to be nothing more than the widow of the Prince of Wales. It was strictly forbidden to designate any longer by the title of QUEEN, the woman who for sixteen years had been Queen of England, and as such had been honoured and recognised; or in any way to shew her the

respect due to the King's wife. No one dared call her anything but the Princess of Wales; and in order that nothing should destroy this illusion on the part of the people, or of the noble Queen herself, Katharine was banished from court, and exiled to the palace which she had once occupied as the wife of the Prince of Wales.

“I have always considered this as one of the finest and most skilful strokes of policy of our noble King, and yet in the whole history of these divorces, he conducted himself with wonderful consistency and decision. But that shews he was incited by opposition to his will. Bear this well in mind, therefore, my dear child (and it is for this reason I have alluded so expressly to the subject) King Henry can in nowise endure a contradiction, or subject himself to any outward coercion. If you want to gain him over to any purpose, you must seek to withdraw the object: it must be surrounded with difficulties and obstacles. Shew yourself accordingly prudish and indif-

ferent: that will attract him: do not seek his glances and he will seek yours. And when at length he declares his love, speak of your virtue and of your conscience, until eventually, to satisfy your scruples, he sends this troublesome Katharine Parr to the scaffold, or does as he did with Katharine of Arragon, and declares that he had not given his inward consent to this marriage, and that consequently Katharine is not a Queen, but the widow of Lord Latimer. Ah, since he made himself the high priest of his church there are no longer obstacles for him in such matters—for God alone is more powerful than the King.

“The beautiful Anna Bullen, Henry’s second wife, is a proof of this. I have often seen her, and I tell you, Jane, she possessed wondrous beauty; whoever looked at her must love her, and those upon whom she smiled, felt as it were under an enchanted spell.

“When she presented the King with the Princess Elizabeth, I heard him say he then

stood at the pinnacle of human happiness—at the goal of his wishes, for that the Queen had borne him a legitimate heir to the throne. But this happiness was of brief duration.

“The King discovered one day that Anna Bullen was not the most beautiful woman in the world, but that there were still more attractive ladies at his court, and who therefore seemed to have a better claim to be Queen of England. He had seen Jane Seymour, and Jane was unquestionably more beautiful than Anna Bullen,—for she was not yet the King’s wife, and an obstacle to possessing her intervened in the person of Anna Bullen.

“This obstacle must of course be set aside. Henry could now, by virtue of his omnipotence, have caused himself once more to be separated from his wife, but he was unwilling to repeat himself: he wished to be always original; and nobody should dare to say, that his divorces were only the cloak for his capricious and amatory impulses.

“It was on the ground of conscientious

scruples that he got himself separated from Katharine of Arragon—but a different plan had to be invented for dealing with Anna Bullen.

“The shortest way of getting rid of her was the scaffold. Why should not Anna travel the same path that so many others had done before her? For a new era had commenced in the King’s life. The tiger had licked blood; his instincts were aroused, and he no longer shrank back from the crimson rivulets which flowed through the veins of his subjects. He had bestowed a royal purple robe on Anna Bullen, and why should she not in return, yield him up her crimson life-blood? For this there was only a pretext wanting, and that was soon found. Lady Rochford was Jane Seymour’s aunt; and she succeeded in finding some individuals who, she maintained, had been the lovers of the beautiful Anna Bullen. As first Lady of the Bedchamber to the Queen, Lady Rochford could certainly furnish the most plausible explanations upon

such a subject, and the King believed her. He believed her, although the four pretended lovers of the Queen, who were executed for the alleged crime, protested on the scaffold, with one exception, that Anna Bullen was innocent, and that they had never even approached her. The only one who accused the Queen of an illicit correspondence with him, was a musician named James Smeaton. But for this confession he had been promised his life. Meanwhile they did not deem it advisable to keep this promise, for they feared that if confronted with the Queen, he might not have the hardihood to support his assertion. In order, however, not to appear wholly ungrateful for this useful confession, they extended to him the favour of not being executed by the axe, but he was granted the easier and more ignoble death of being hanged.

“The lovely and beautiful Anna Bullen had, therefore, to lay her head upon the block. On the day of her execution the King had commanded a large hunting party, and in the

morning we rode forth towards Epping Forest. The King was at first unusually cheerful and jocose, and he commanded me to ride beside him and relate the current gossip and court scandal. He laughed at my malicious anecdotes, and the more I defamed my fellow courtiers the more was his mirth increased. At length we halted. The King had laughed and talked so much that he became hungry at last. He reclined under the shade of an oak, and in the midst of his retinue and of his dogs, he partook of breakfast with wonderful zest and appetite—albeit he had now become somewhat more silent and reserved, and looked from time to time in the direction of London, with visible anxiety and uneasiness in his countenance. Suddenly, however, was heard the dull boom of a cannon. We all knew that this was the signal which was to announce to the King that Anna Bullen's head had fallen. We knew it, and a cold shudder ran through our veins. The King alone smiled; and standing up and taking his hunting accoutre-

ments from my hands, he said with a serene countenance: "It is over! The work is done. Unleash the dogs, and let us follow the chase."

"That," said Lord Douglas, with sadness, "was the funeral discourse which the King uttered concerning his lovely and innocent wife."

"Do you pity her, my lord?" asked Lady Jane, with surprise. "If I mistake not, Anna Bullen was an enemy of our church, and an adherent of the detestable new doctrines."

Her father shrugged his shoulders with an air of contempt. "That did not prevent Queen Anna from belonging to the fairest and most charming women of England. And besides, however much she may have inclined to the new doctrines, she did us one essential service at least, for it was she who caused the death of Sir Thomas More. She hated him because he did not favour her marriage with the King, and so did the King likewise for his refusing to take the oath of supremacy. Nevertheless,

Henry would have spared him—for at that time he still had some respect for learning and virtue, and Sir Thomas was so learned a man that he won the King's good graces. But Anna Bullen desired his death, and accordingly he had to mount the scaffold. Ah, believe me, Jane, it was a glorious, though a melancholy hour for all England, that hour when the head of Sir Thomas More was laid on the block. But we happy courtiers of Whitehall Palace—we alone were cheerful and merry on the occasion. We danced a new dance, the music of which the King himself had composed; for you know the King is not only an author, but also a musical amateur, and as he now writes pious books, so he then composed dance music. Every evening when we had danced ourselves tired, we sat down to the card table. And just as I had won a few guineas from the King, the Governor of the Tower arrived with intelligence that the execution had taken place, and gave us an account of the last moments of the great

scholar. The King threw down his cards, and, casting an angry glance at Anna Bullen, said, with a tremulous voice, 'You are guilty of the death of this man.' He then rose up, and retired to his apartments, whither no one dared to follow him—not even the Queen. You see then that Anna Bullen has a claim to our gratitude, for the death of Sir Thomas More delivered England from another great danger. Melancthon and Bucer, and with them some of the greatest pulpit orators of Germany, had set out on their journey to London, as delegates from the Protestant Princes of Germany, to nominate the King as the Chief of their league. But the fearful news of the execution of their friend drove them back in terror, after they had accomplished half their journey.

"Peace, therefore, to the ashes of the unhappy Anna Bullen, who has meanwhile been avenged—avenged upon her rival and successor, on whose account she had to mount the scaffold—avenged on Jane Seymour."

"But she was the King's favourite wife," said Lady Jane, "and when she died he mourned for her two whole years."

"Yes, he mourned," said Lord Douglas, with a sneer. "He mourned for all his wives. Even for Anna Bullen he put on a mourning suit, and in his white mourning robes he led Jane Seymour to the nuptial altar two days after the execution of Anna Bullen. What signifies outward mourning? Did not Anna Bullen mourn in like manner for Katharine of Arragon, whom she had driven from the throne. For eight weeks she wore weeds for Henry's first wife; but Anna was a prudent woman, and she knew that yellow robes became her admirably."

"But the King mourned for Jane Seymour not only outwardly, but in reality," said Lady Jane, "for it was only after the lapse of two years that he resolved upon a new marriage."

Lord Douglas laughed. "But during these two years of widowhood he was consoled in some measure, by having fallen in love with

the beautiful Marguerite de Montreuil, a French lady, and he would have married her too, had her prudence not been as great as her beauty ; and so she preferred returning to France, rather than accept the perilous distinction of becoming Henry's fourth queen."

"But yet, my father, the case of Jane Seymour was very natural, for she died in childbed."

"Aye, truly in childbed, and yet not a natural death, for she might have been saved. But Henry would not have it so. His love had already cooled down ; and when the physicians asked if they should save the mother or the child, he replied, 'Save the child by all means, I can get wives enough.'

"Ah, my daughter, I hope you may not die such a natural death as poor Jane Seymour, for whom, as you say, the King mourned for two years. But after this, the King met with quite a novel and extraordinary adventure. In short, he fell in love with a picture ; and as, in his lofty self-complacency, he

felt persuaded that the beautiful portrait of himself which Holbein had painted, did not at all flatter him, but was quite true to nature, he never suspected that Holbein's likeness of the Princess Anne of Cleves could have been flattered or incorrect. The King accordingly became enamoured of a portrait, and sent his envoys to Germany, in order to bring over the fair original of this picture to England for his wife. He even went forward himself to meet her at Rochester. Ah, Jane! I have seen many strange and ridiculous things in the course of my life, but that scene at Rochester must be reckoned as the most piquant of all my reminiscences. The King was glowing with more than poetic inspiration, and as madly in love as a boy of twenty, and thus began our romantic bridal excursion, in which Henry appeared, incognito, as my cousin. To me was given the flattering commission, as Master of the Horse, to convey to the young Queen the greetings of her ardent bridegroom, and to beg of her to receive the

cavalier who should hand her a present from the King. She granted my request with a simpering smile, which disclosed to view a fearful set of yellow teeth ; I opened the door, and allowed the King to enter. Ah, you should have witnessed that scene ! It was the only bit of farce in the bloody tragedy of Henry's matrimonial career. You should have seen with what hasty impatience Henry rushed in, and then suddenly on seeing her, staggered back, and stared at the Princess ; and then slowly retreating, put the costly gift which he had brought with him into my hand, without uttering a word, but casting a look of intense anger at Cromwell, who had brought him the portrait of the princess, and had led him into this marriage. The romantic and ardent lover vanished after this first glance at his fair bride. He approached the princess again, but on this occasion in his own character, and in a harsh and hasty manner said he himself was the King. He bade her welcome in a few words, and bestowed upon her a cold and formal

greeting. Then, however, he suddenly took my hand and drew me away with him, while he made a signal to the others to follow ; and when at length we got out of the atmosphere of this poor unprepossessing princess, and were some distance away, the King turned with an angry countenance to Cromwell, and said : ‘ Is that what you call beauty ? I call her a Flemish mare, but not a princess.’

“ Anne’s plain face, I doubt not, was bestowed upon her by God, in order that the only true Church should be delivered from the danger which threatened it. For had Anne of Cleves—the sister, niece, aunt, and grand-daughter of all the German Protestant princes—had she, I say, been handsome, our church would have been threatened by dangers beyond conception. The King could not overcome his dislike, and once more his conscience, which always appeared most tender and scrupulous when it was most lax and irregular, must needs come to his aid.

“ Accordingly, the king declared that he had

only outwardly, and not in his inward conscience, consented to this marriage, from which he was now shrinking back ; as it would, he alleged, be in reality nothing less than a breach of faith—a perjury and a bigamy. For had not Anne’s father once already betrothed her to the son of the Duke of Lorrain ? had he not pledged his solemn word, that he would give him his daughter to wed when he should have attained his majority ? Rings had already been exchanged, the marriage contract already drawn up. Anne of Cleves therefore was really married already, and accordingly Henry, with his tender conscience, could not make the betrothed lady his wife. He therefore made her his sister, and gave her the palace at Richmond for a residence, if she wished to remain in England. She accepted it: her blood, which ran coldly and sluggishly through her veins, did not revolt at the thought of being rejected and contemned. She accepted the offer, and remained in England.

“ Anne of Cleves was rejected because she

was plain, and now the King chose Katharine Howard for his fifth wife, because she was handsome. Of this marriage I can tell you but little, for at that time I had already been sent on a diplomatic mission to Dublin, whither you soon followed me. Katharine was very beautiful, and the King's heart already feeling the effect of time, was once more inflamed with the fire of youthful love. He loved her more ardently than any of his former wives, and he was so happy in her society, that he publicly knelt down in church and thanked God for the felicity which he enjoyed with his beautiful young Queen. But that did not last long; for at the very moment that the King was proclaiming his wedded bliss, he had already reached its culminating point, and the next day he was hurled from this pinnacle into the abyss. I speak without poetical exaggeration, my dear child; the previous day, he thanked God for his happiness, and on the morrow, Katharine Howard was already under confinement, and accused of being a

faithless wife, and a shameless profligate. More than seven lovers had already preceded her spouse, and some of them had even accompanied her on the royal progress which she made in the north with her husband. On this occasion it was no pretext, for Henry had not yet had time to grow enamoured of any other woman, and Katharine had well understood how to attach him to her, and always to kindle fresh ardour in his breast. But for the very reason that he loved her, he could not pardon her for having deceived him. So much cruelty and hatred is there in love ; and Henry, who only yesterday lay like a lamb at her feet, was to-day as excited with jealousy and rage, as he had yesterday been with rapture and delight. Still in his anger he loved her, and when he held in his hands the unequivocal proofs of her guilt, he wept like a child. But as he could no longer be her lover, he resolved to be her executioner. As she had polluted the purple of his royal robes, he wished to dye them afresh in the crimson of her blood ; and he did it.

Katharine Howard was compelled to lay her beautiful head upon the block, as Anna Bullen had done before her, and the death of the latter was now once more avenged. Lady Rochford had been the accuser of Anna Bullen, and it was her testimony which brought that Queen to the scaffold; but now she was herself convicted of having been privy and accessory to Katharine Howard's love intrigues, and with Katharine's head fell also that of Lady Rochford, under the executioner's axe.

"Ah! it required a long time to recover the King from this blow; for the space of two years he sought for the pure and blameless virgin who could become his wife, without peril of the scaffold. But he found none, and so he took to himself Katharine Parr, the widow of Lord Latimer. But you know, my child, the name of Katharine is one of evil omen for Henry's wives. The first Katharine was put away—the second beheaded—what will be the fate of the third?"

Lady Jane smiled.

"Katharine does not love the King," she said, "and I believe she would willingly consent, like Anne of Cleves, to become his sister instead of his wife."

"What! Katharine not love the King?" asked Lord Douglas, with breathless eagerness. "Does she love another then?"

"No, my lord. Her heart is still like a sheet of blank paper,—for as yet no name is inscribed thereon."

"Then it will be our task to write a name upon it, and this name must send her to the block, or else cause her to be put aside," said Lord Douglas, with vehemence. "It will be your business, Jane, to write, with a pen of iron, some name or other so legibly on her heart that the King may be able to read it at some future day."

CHAPTER VIII.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

BOTH were now silent for some time. Lord Douglas had leaned back in his seat, and breathing fast, seemed to recover himself a little from the effect of long speaking. But while he thus rested, his large piercing eyes were unceasingly fixed upon lady Jane, who had reclined on the ottoman, and looking with a meditative air of abstraction, seemed to have forgotten her father's presence.

An arch smile played for a moment upon the features of the Earl, on perceiving the abstracted gaze of his daughter; but it speedily

vanished, and then his brow became marked with lines of deep thought.

Seeing that his daughter was still wrapt in visionary dreams, he at length laid his hand upon her shoulder, and said, hastily: "What are you thinking of, Jane?"

She started violently, and looked at the Earl with an air of confusion.

"I was thinking of all you had said to me, my father," she replied. "I was considering what advantage I could derive from it for our purpose."

Lord Douglas shook his head with an incredulous smile: "Take care, Jane," said he, at length, in a grave tone,— "take care that your heart does not belie your head. If we are to attain our object in this matter, you must, above all things, keep your head and your heart cool. Do you think you possess both already?"

She cast down her eyes with visible embarrassment, before the penetrating glance of Lord Douglas. He perceived it, and a hasty

word rose to his lips, but he checked it. As a prudent diplomatist, he knew that it is sometimes more advisable to destroy a thing by ignoring it, than to enter into an open contest upon its merits.

The feelings are like the dragon's teeth of Theseus. When we overcome them they always grow afresh, and spring from the ground with increased vigour.

Lord Douglas was, therefore, careful not to remark his daughter's confusion. "Pardon me, Jane," he said, "if in my zeal and my tender regard for you, I have gone too far. I know that your dear and beautiful head is cool enough to bear the crown; I know that in your heart dwell ambition and religion alone. Let us therefore consider what further we have to do in order to accomplish our purpose. We have already spoken of Henry as a husband and as a man, and I trust you have drawn some useful lessons from the fate of his wives. You have seen that a wife must possess all the

good and all the bad qualities of a woman, in order to be able to rule this stiff-necked tyrant—this voluptuous—this vain, and sensual man. But above all things, you must have a perfect knowledge of the art of coquetry. You must be a female Proteus. To-day—a Messalina—to-morrow, a devotee—the next day, a learned woman—and the day after, a toying girl; you must always seek to take the King by surprise—to keep his mind on the strain, and make him cheerful. You must never abandon yourself to the dangerous feeling of security, for, in fact, Henry's wife is never safe; the axe hangs continually above her head;—so that you must always regard your husband only as a capricious lover, whom you have each day to win anew."


"You speak, my father, as if I were already the wife of the King," said Lady Jane, smiling; "and yet it seems to me that there are still many difficulties to overcome before I reach that point; difficulties which are perhaps insurmountable."

"Insurmountable?" said Lord Douglas, with a shrug. "With the aid of holy church there are no obstacles insurmountable; we have only to be quite sure beforehand of our object, and of the means to its attainment. Do not, therefore, disdain to probe the King's character again and again, and you may be certain you will always discover in it some new feature—some striking peculiarity. We have spoken of him as a husband and family man, but of his religious and political characteristics I have said nothing; and these it is which constitute the essence of his whole being.

"First of all then, Jane, I will tell you a secret. The King, who has made himself the chief priest of his church—whom the Pope once called the champion and defender of the faith—the King, I say, has in his heart, no religion whatever. He is merely a pliant reed, swayed to and fro by the wind. He does not himself know what he wishes; and dallying with both sides, he is to-day a heretic,

in order to make it appear that he is a strong-minded, free-thinking man, of enlightened reason—to-morrow a catholic, in order to exhibit himself as the obedient and humble servant of God, who only seeks for salvation through works of love and piety. But in his inmost soul, he has an equal indifference for both creeds; and had the Pope formerly thrown no difficulties in his way,—had he favoured his divorce from Katharine, King Henry would still have continued a faithful and active member of the Catholic Church. But his holiness was so imprudent as to excite him by contradiction; Henry's pride and vanity were stung, until he revolted, and so he became a church reformer—not from conviction—but from a pure love of opposition. And this, my daughter, you must never forget, for by means of this lever, you may once more convert him to be a strict, dutiful and obedient son of the Holy Church. He has broken off with the

Pope, and has assumed the supremacy of the church, but he could not find in himself the courage to carry out his work, and throw himself altogether into the arms of the reformation. Though he opposed the papal authority, yet he has ever remained true to the church—albeit perhaps he does not know it himself. He is a catholic, and hears the mass; he has abolished the monasteries, and yet forbidden the priests to marry; he allows the Eucharist to be administered in one kind, and believes in transubstantiation. He abolishes monasteries, but still enjoins that the vows of celibacy, as well of monks as of nuns, shall be strictly maintained; and, finally, auricular confession is a very necessary part of his church. And that is what he calls his Six Articles, as the basis of his ‘English Church.’ Poor, vain, and short-sighted man! He knows not that he has done all this, only because he wished to make himself Pope, while he is nothing more than the anti-



Pope of the Holy Father, whom he dares with scandalous effrontery to call the 'Bishop of Rome.' "

"But for this audacity," said Lady Jane, with looks of vindictive triumph, "the anathema has smitten him and cursed his head, and has given him up to the scorn and contempt of his own subjects. For this the Holy Father justly denounces him as an apostate and abandoned son—the blasphemous usurper of the holy church. Therefore has the Pope declared his crown forfeit, and has awarded it to any one that shall acquire it by force of arms. Therefore has the Pope forbidden his subjects to obey him, or to honour and recognise him as their king."

"And yet he continues King of England, and his subjects obey him with slavish submission," exclaimed Lord Douglas, with a shrug. "It was rather unwise to carry threats so far; for one should never threaten unless he is prepared to carry his threats into execution. Unfortunately the papal anathema has

served the King more than it has injured him, for it has driven him to assume a more fierce opposition, and has proved to his subjects that he may be stricken by the ban of excommunication, and yet live happily in the full enjoyment of life.

“No; the anathemas of Rome have in no wise hurt the King, nor has his throne suffered the slightest shock; but the defection of the king has deprived the Holy See of a powerful support; and therefore we must lead the faithless monarch back once more to the holy church. And that is the task, my daughter, which God and the will of his sacred vicar, commits to your hands—an excellent—a glorious, and a meritorious work, for it will make you a Queen. But I repeat it, be cautious, and never rouse the King by opposition to his wishes. This vacillating man must be led unconsciously to that point which his salvation demands; for, as I have said, he is a vacillator, and in the haughty pride of his kingship, he presumes to over-rule all parties, and estab-

lish a new church for himself—a church which is neither catholic nor protestant, but his church—the laws of which are found in the Six Articles, or in the so-called ‘Bloody Statute.’

“He will neither be a catholic nor a protestant, and in order to shew his impartiality, he is an equally dreaded partizan of both sides. Thus it has come to pass that in England, he hangs those who are catholics, and burns those who are not. It affords the King pleasure to hold, with firm and relentless grasp, the balance between both parties, and on the same day on which he throws a papist into a dungeon, for having questioned the royal supremacy, he puts a reformer on the rack for having denied transubstantiation—or for having perhaps rejected the doctrine of auricular confession. Even during the last session of parliament five persons were hanged for having called the Supremacy in question : and five others burned for having adhered to the principles of the reformers. And on this

very evening, Jane—the evening of the King’s wedding day—both catholics and protestants coupled two by two, like dogs, have been sent to the stake, at the special command of his majesty, who, as head of the church, wished to shew his impartiality,—the catholics being condemned as traitors and the others as heretics.”

“ Oh,” exclaimed Lady Jane, shuddering and turning pale, “ I won’t be Queen of England. I have a horror of such a cruel and ferocious king, whose heart knows neither pity nor mercy.”

Her father laughed.

“ Don’t you know, then, child, how a hyena may be rendered harmless, and a tiger tamed ? Why, we generally throw them some food that they can swallow, and as they love blood so much, we give them blood to drink, so that they may never have to thirst for it. The King’s only constant and unchanging peculiarity is his cruelty and blood-craving—so that we must always have some food of this

kind ready for him, and then he will always be a very gracious king and amiable husband.

“And there is no lack of objects to satisfy his appetite in this respect. There are so many men and women at his Court; and when he is in his blood-thirsty humour, it makes no difference to Henry whose blood he swallows. He has shed the blood of his wives and relatives, he has sent to the scaffold those whom he called his most trusty friends, and he has sent the most worthy man in his realm to the block.

“Sir Thomas More knew him well, and in a single striking sentence he summed up the King’s whole character. Ah, Jane, it seems to me as if I saw the mild, serene countenance of that sage, as I saw him standing in that embrasure of the window, and the King beside him with his arm on the shoulder of the Chancellor More, listening to his discourse with a kind of reverential devotion. And when the King had departed, I approached

Sir Thomas, and wished him joy at the great favour, publicly recognised, which he possessed with the King. 'The King loves you most sincerely, I observed. 'Yes,' he replied, with his sad quiet smile, 'Yes, the King loves me truly; but that would not for a moment prevent him from sacrificing my head for a costly jewel, a beautiful woman, or a square mile of territory in France.'

"He was right, and it was for a beautiful woman that the head of that great philosopher was made to fall—of whom the most christian Emperor, Charles the Fifth, said: 'Had I been the master of such a servant, of whose great powers and abilities I have myself had so much experience for many years—had I possessed so wise and firm a counsellor as Sir Thomas More, I would rather have lost the fairest city in my dominions than so worthy a statesman and servant.' Aye, Jane, that must be your first and holiest law, never to trust the King, and never to reckon upon the continuance of his affection or the marks of

his favour. For, in the perfidy of his heart, it often pleases him to shower favours upon them whose ruin he has already resolved, and to deck with honours and orders to-day those whom to-morrow he has doomed to die. It flatters his self-love, like the tiger, to play for a while with the whelping which he is about to rend. This he did with Cromwell, the counsellor and friend of many years, who, moreover, had committed no other crime than that he had first shown the King the portrait of the unattractive Anne of Cleves, which Holbein had flattered to an uncommon extent. But the King was careful not to be angry with Cromwell thereat, nor to reproach him. On the contrary, he raised him, in recognition of his great merits, to the dignity of Earl of Essex; decorated him with the Order of the Garter, and appointed him Lord High Chamberlain; and then only, when Cromwell felt himself quite safe, and basked in the sunshine of royal favour,—then it was that the King had him seized and flung into the Tower on

a charge of high treason. And so Cromwell was executed because Anne of Cleves did not please the King, and because Hans Holbein's portrait had flattered her.

"But now we have said enough of the past, Jane; let us therefore speak of the present and of the future. Let us now bethink us of the means of overthrowing this woman, who stands in our way. When once her downfall is accomplished, it will not be difficult for us to put you in her place; for now you are here in the King's vicinity. That was the great drawback to our previous endeavours, that we were not on the spot; and that we could only work through intermediators and confidants. The King had not seen you, and since the unhappy affair of Anne of Cleves, he distrusted portraits. I knew that very well, for I trust no one, Jane,—not even my most faithful and dearest friend. I build upon no one but ourselves. Had we been here, you would already have been in the place of Katharine Parr,—you would have been Queen of England.

But, to our misfortune, I was still a favourite of the Regent of Scotland, and, as such, I durst not venture to come near Henry. It was necessary that I should fall into disgrace in the north, in order to become more certain of the King's favour here.

“Having, then, fallen into disgrace, I fled hither, and now that we are here let the contest begin. You have already this day taken a long stride towards the goal; you have drawn the King's attention upon you, and fixed yourself more firmly in Katharine's favour. I must confess, Jane, that I have been enchanted with your discreet behaviour. You have to-day gained the goodwill of all parties, and it was admirably prudent of you to come to the aid of the Earl of Surrey, while at the same time you won over the heretical Court party, to which Maria Askew belongs. Yes, Jane, that was a clever stroke of policy; for the Howard family is the greatest and most powerful at Court; and Henry, Earl of Surrey, is one of its most powerful representatives.

We have, therefore, already a strong party at Court—a party which has before its eyes only the high and sacred object of assisting holy church once more to regain the victory, and which works quietly and silently to reconcile the King with the Pope. Henry Howard is like his father, the Duke of Norfolk,—a good catholic, as in like manner was his niece, Katharine Howard, only that she, while devoted to God and the church, was at the same time too earnest an admirer of the opposite sex to her own. That was what procured the victory for the other side, and which caused the catholics once more to succumb to the heretical Court party. Yes, for the moment, Cranmer has conquered us with Katherine Parr, but Gardiner, with the aid of Jane Douglas, will soon overcome the heretics, and send them to the scaffold. That is our plan, and with God's grace we shall bring it about."

"But it will be a difficult task," said Lady Jane, with a sigh. "The Queen is a pure un-

sullied woman, and she has besides a wise head and a keen perception. In her thoughts too she is innocence itself, and shrinks with virgin timidity from the very thought of sin."

"She must be weaned from this timidity, Jane, and that will be your task. You must expel all these strict notions of virtue from her mind; you must seek, by insinuating ways, to ensnare her heart, and seduce it from such rigid and scrupulous principles."

"Oh, that would be an infernal scheme!" exclaimed Lady Jane, turning pale. "That would be a crime, my father; for it would be not only to destroy her earthly happiness, but also to endanger her soul. That I should beguile her to sin and crime is surely not your odious request? If so, I will not obey you! It is true I hate her, for she stands in the way of my ambition; it is true I am willing to ruin her, for she wears the crown which I wish to possess, but I will never do anything so infamous as to pour into her heart the poison by which she is to fall. Let her seek

the deadly draught herself, I will not restrain her hand, I shall not warn her. Let her find the paths of sin if she will, I shall not tell her she is going astray ; nay, I will watch all her movements, and listen to every word and every sigh that escapes her, and when she has committed herself by a false step, then I shall betray her, and give her up to her judges. That is what I can and will do. I shall be the evil genius, who in God's name will expel her from Paradise ; but not the serpent who in the name of Satan would allure her to sin."

She ceased, and panting for breath leant back in her chair ; but now her father's hand was laid upon her shoulder with a convulsive grasp, and with eyes flashing with anger, and his face pale with rage, he looked at her with a fixed and stern gaze.

Lady Jane uttered a cry of terror. She, who had never seen her father, but in a smiling and cordial mood, scarcely recognized the features now changed by anger. She could hardly convince herself that this man, with fire-flash-



ing eyes and knitted brows, and lips quivering with passion, was really her father.

“You will not?” he exclaimed in a deep threatening tone. “Do you dare to resist the sacred behests of the Church? Or have you forgotten the promise you made to the holy Fathers, whose disciple you are? Have you forgotten that the Brethren and Sisters of the holy league dare have no other will than that of their Superior? Have you forgotten the solemn vow which you made to Ignatius Loyola, the Chief of our Order? Answer me, faithless and undutiful daughter of the church! Repeat to me the oath which you took when he received you into the sacred order of the Society of Jesus? Repeat your oath, I say!”

As if impelled by an invisible power, Lady Jane had now risen from her seat, and with trembling humility, and with her hands folded across her breast, she stood before her father, whose tall, commanding, and angry form seemed to tower above her.

“I have sworn,” she replied, “to subject my own mind and will, my life and all my actions, dutifully to the will of the holy fathers. I have sworn to be a blind instrument in the hands of my superiors, and to do only what they command or enjoin. I have promised to serve the holy and only saving church, and to submit myself to its directions in every respect, and by every means; none of which I am to despise, or consider too trifling, provided it conduces to the end in view. For the end sanctifies the means, and nothing is a crime when done for the honour of God and of his church.”

“*Ad majorem Dei gloriam!*” said her father, devoutly folding his hands. “And do you know what awaits you if you break your vow?”

“Yes—disgrace here, and perdition hereafter—the execration of all my Brethren and Sisters—eternal reprobation and the pains of hell. The holy Fathers will put me to death under numberless pains and tortures, and

while they kill my body, and fling it for food to beasts of prey, they will curse my soul and deliver it to the flames!"

"And what awaits you if you remain true to your word, and obey the commands which you shall receive?"

"Honour and glory upon earth, and everlasting bliss in heaven!"

"Then you will be a Queen on earth and a Queen in heaven. Of course you know the laws of the Society, and remember your oath?"

"I do."

"And you know that the blessed Loyola, before he left us, appointed a General Superior for the Society of Jesus in England, which Superior all the brethren and sisters must obey, and to whom they are bound to render blind and unconditional submission?"

"I know it."

"And you know also by what sign the members are enabled to recognise the General Superior?"

"Yes, by the ring of Loyola which he wears on the fore finger of his right hand."

"And here you behold the ring," said the Earl, drawing forth his hand from his doublet.

Lady Jane uttered a loud cry, and fell almost unconscious at his feet.

Lord Douglas raised her up in his arms with a tender smile.

"You see, Jane, I am not only your father, but also your Master. And you will obey me will you not?"

"Yes, I shall obey you," she replied in a faint voice, while she kissed the hand bearing the ominous ring.

"Then you will be for Katharine Parr, as you express it, the serpent that shall beguile her to sin?"

"I will."

"You will seduce her to sin, and allure her to a love which shall lead to her ruin?"

"Yes. I will do so, my father."

"I must now designate to you the person

whom she shall love, and who shall be the instrument of her destruction. You are to lead her on to become enamoured of Henry Howard, 'Earl of Surrey.'

Lady Jane uttered a loud cry, and seized the back of her chair to support her from falling.

Her father once more scanned her with an angry and penetrating glance.

"What means this cry? Why does the selection surprise you?" he asked.

Lady Jane had already recovered her self-possession. "It surprises me," she replied, "because the earl is already married."

A peculiar smile played around the lips of the Earl. "It is not the first time," he said, "that a married man has become dangerous to a woman's heart, and it is just the impossibility of possession which has given fresh impulse to the flames of love. The hearts of women are full of caprice and contradiction."

Lady Jane looked away and did not reply; she felt that the keen and piercing glance

of her father rested upon her features, and she knew that he was reading the thoughts of her heart, even though she did not return his gaze.

"Then you will no longer refuse?" he asked at length. "You will inspire the young Queen with love for the Earl of Surrey?"

"I will try to do so, my father."

"Then if you try with the proper intention, and with the will to succeed, you will gain your point. For, as you say, the Queen's heart is still free; it is therefore like a fertile soil, which only requires the seed to be sown therein, that it may yield fruit and flowers. Katharine Parr does not love the King: you will therefore teach her to love the Earl of Surrey."

"But, my lord," said Lady Jane with an ironical smile, "in order to attain this result with certainty, we should possess beforehand some magic spell, by virtue of which the Earl should first be inspired with a passion for the Queen. For the Queen has a proud spirit, and

she will never so far forget the dignity of her sex and station, as to love a man who has not already become deeply enamoured of her. But the Earl possesses not only a wife, but also, it is said, a mistress."

"Ah, then you hold it as perfectly unworthy of a woman to love a man by whom she is not besought?" asked the Earl in a significant tone. "I am rejoiced to hear this from my daughter, and to be thus assured that *she*, at least, will not fall in love with the Earl of Surrey, who is everywhere known as the 'Lady-Killer.' And as you have taken the pains to become accurately informed of the private relationships of the Earl, it was doubtless only because your acute and discerning mind had already anticipated the commission which I intended to give you respecting that nobleman. Moreover, daughter, you are in error; and if a certain high, but, nevertheless, unfortunate lady should haply fall in love with the Earl of Surrey, her fate will here be, as perhaps it is elsewhere, to exercise resignation."

While her father thus spoke, an expression of joyful surprise shone upon the features of Lady Jane; but it soon gave way to a ghastly paleness, as the Earl added: "Henry Howard is destined for Katharine Parr, and you must help her to love this proud and handsome Earl (who is a faithful servant of holy church) so ardently that she shall forget all the dangers and consequences of such a step."

Lady Jane did not venture an objection. She hung eagerly upon her father's words, in order once more to find means of escape.

"You say the Earl is a true servant of our church," she observed: "and yet you wish to implicate him in our dangerous plans. You have not, therefore, reflected that it is just as perilous to love the Queen as to be loved by her. And if, peradventure, love for the Earl of Surrey should lead the Queen to the scaffold, it will also cause the head of the Earl to fall at the same time, whether he returns her love or not."

Lord Douglas shrugged his shoulders.

“ If the good of the Church and our holy religion is concerned, we must not shrink from the danger which perchance one of our party may incur. To a holy cause holy victims must frequently fall a sacrifice. Let therefore the Earl’s head be forfeit, provided the Church can but gain new life and energy from the martyr’s blood. But see, Jane, the morning is already beginning to dawn, and I must hasten to leave you, lest these scandal-loving courtiers should regard the father as a lover, and throw suspicion on the pure virtue of my excellent daughter. Farewell, therefore, for the present. We both know our parts now, and we will endeavour to play them successfully. You are the confidential friend of the Queen, while I am the harmless courtier who now and then attempts to win a smile from his King by some jocose pleasantry. That is all. Good morning then, Jane, and good night. For you must sleep, my child, lest your cheeks should lose their bloom, or your eyes their

brightness. The Kings detests pale, languishing faces. Sleep, therefore, future Queen of England !”

He kissed her brow faintly, and left the room with a stealthy pace.

Lady Jane listened till the sound of his footsteps was lost; and then exhausted and overcome, she sank upon her knees.

“Wretched one that I am,” she murmured, while streams of tears bathed her countenance. “I am to inspire the Queen with love for the Earl of Surrey, at the same time that—I love him myself!”

CHAPTER IX.

THE NEXT DAY.

THE grand drawing-room was over. Katharine, sitting on the throne beside the King, had received the congratulations of her Court; and the smiling glances of the King, and the half-audible words of affection, which he now and then addressed to the Queen, testified to the acute and quick-witted courtiers that the King was to-day as enamoured of his young wife as he had yesterday been of his bride. They accordingly vied with each other, to shew their homage to her Majesty, and to catch every look and smile which she bestowed on those around her, that they might thus per-

chance discover the future favourites of the Queen, and already sue for their good graces.

But the eyes of the young Queen were directed to no one in particular ; she was cordial and smiling, but her courtiers felt that this cordiality was strained, and that her smile was tinged with sadness. The King alone did not observe it. He was cheerful and happy, and it therefore seemed to him that no one at his court could dare to sigh or feel weary—as the King himself was satisfied.

After the drawing room was over—at which all the great and noble of the kingdom had passed in solemn procession before the royal pair, the King, conformably with the court etiquette of the time, gave his hand to his spouse, and assisting her to descend from the throne, led her into the midst of the saloon, in order to present to her the members of the Court who were to form the staff on her service.

But this journey from the throne to the middle of the room had fatigued the King.

This promenade of thirty paces was for him a very unusual and laborious task, and the King was anxious to exchange it for another and a more agreeable one. He therefore beckoned to the Lord Chamberlain, and commanded him to have the doors leading to the dining-room thrown open; he then ordered his "house chariot" to be brought forward, and sitting upright therein with all possible dignity, he caused it to stand beside the Queen, waiting impatiently for the ceremony of presentation to be over, that Katharine might accompany him to dinner.

Already the presentation of the female portion and the maids of honor was ended, and now came the turn of the gentlemen.


The Lord Chamberlain read aloud from his list the names of those cavaliers who were for the future to attend upon the Queen, and whom the King had designated in the list with his own hand. And as each new name was announced, an expression of smiling astonishment marked the faces of the courtly

assemblage; for it was always one of the youngest and handsomest, and most agreeable of the lords that was successively named by the Chamberlain.

The King had perhaps contemplated a cruel game with his wife: in surrounding her with the young men of his court, he wished perhaps to throw her into the midst of danger; either that she might perish therein, or that avoiding the snares around her, he might be able to place the unassailable virtue of his young wife in the clearest light.

The list had commenced with the subordinate offices, and going upwards it had now reached the highest and most important posts of all.

As yet the Master of the Horse, and the Queen's Chamberlain, were not named, and these were doubtless the most weighty changes at the Queen's court; for one or other of these officers was always bound to be in attendance upon the Queen. When she was in the palace the Lord Chamberlain must always wait in her



ante-room ; for it was only through him that any one could gain access to the Queen ; to him were committed her commands respecting the arrangements and pleasures of the day. He must therefore devise new modes of amusement and royal diversion ; he had the privilege of joining the more private evening circles of the Queen, and of standing behind the Queen's chair, when the royal couple wished to sup together without ceremony.

This office of Chamberlain was therefore a very important one ; for as it confined him to the vicinity of the Queen for the greater part of the day, it was almost inevitable that the Chamberlain should become either the attentive and confidential friend, or the malevolent and prying enemy, of his royal mistress.

But the office of Master of the Horse was no less important ; for whenever the Queen left the palace, whether on foot or in her carriage, whether to take a ride in the forest, or to enjoy the air on the river in her gilded barge, the Master of the Horse had always to be at

her side, had always to accompany her,—nay, this post was yet more exclusive, yet more important. For though the apartments of the Queen were always open to the Chamberlain, still he was never alone with her, as there was always some lady in waiting, who would hinder any private or confidential communication between the Queen and her Chamberlain.

It was otherwise, however, with the Master of the Horse. Many occasions were presented when he could approach the Queen unobserved, or at least speak to her without listeners. It was his duty to assist her in entering and alighting from her carriage, outside of which he was permitted to ride; he accompanied her on her excursions by water, and on her rides on horseback; and these latter were so much the more important, as they offered him to a certain extent the opportunity of a *tête-à-tête* with the Queen. For it was only the Master of the Horse that was permitted to ride by her side; he even

had precedence of the ladies of her suite, in rendering assistance to the Queen, in case of any accident—such as that of the horse stumbling or otherwise. On such occasions, therefore, none of her retinue could know what conversation might pass between the Queen and her Master of the Horse.

We can thus understand how influential such a post must have been. Moreover, whenever the Queen was at Whitehall the King was nearly always beside her; but, thanks to the daily increasing unwieldiness of his body, he was not in a condition to leave the palace, otherwise than in a carriage.

It was therefore very natural that the whole body of courtiers should look forward with strained attention and suspended breathing to the moment when the Chamberlain should designate these two important personages, whose names had been kept so secret, that no one had yet been able to discover them. It was only this morning that the King had in-


scribed these names upon the list before handing it to the Chamberlain.

But not only the Court, but even the King himself looked with anxiety to the mention of these two names. For Henry wished to see the effect which they might produce, and to discover by the varied expression of the countenances of his courtiers, who the friends were of the two nominees. The young Queen alone evinced her usual unaffected cordiality—her heart alone beat with unmoved composure—she did not for a moment suspect the importance of the point of issue.

Even the voice of the Lord Chamberlain trembled a little as he now read: "To the office of Chamberlain to the Queen, his Majesty appoints my Lord Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey.

A murmur of approbation was audible, and an agreeable surprise became evident in the faces of nearly all.

"He has a good many friends," muttered the King to himself. "He is therefore dangerous."



An angry glance from his eye met the youthful Earl, who was just approaching the young Queen, to bend his knee before her, and to kiss the hand which was extended to him.

Behind the Queen stood Lady Jane, and when she saw the young, handsome, long-sighed for, and secretly-worshipped Noble so near her, and when she thought of her vow, she felt an angry pang and a poignant jealousy against the young Queen, who, without suspecting it, robbed her of the man she loved, and condemned her to the fearful agony of being herself the instrument of her own unhappiness.

The Chamberlain now read with loud and solemn voice: "To the office of Master of the Horse to the Queen, his Majesty appoints my Lord Thomas Seymour, Earl of Sudley."


It was well that the King, at this moment, had directed his whole attention to his courtiers, and sought to read in their features the impression which the appointment produced.

Had he observed his young spouse, he would have perceived how an expression of joyful astonishment overspread the face of Katharine, and how a sweet smile played around her lips.

But the King, as we have said, thought only of his court; he only saw that the number of those who rejoiced at Seymour's appointment, did not nearly equal that of the others who had received the appointment of Surrey with such marked approbation.

Henry's brow became contracted, and he muttered to himself: "These Howards are too powerful. I shall keep a watchful eye upon them."

In his turn, Thomas Seymour approached the Queen, and bending his knee, kissed her hand. Katharine received him with a kindly smile. "My lord," she said, "you are at once to enter upon your attendance with me, and in a way too which I trust will be agreeable to all the Court. You will be pleased, my lord, to mount your swiftest courser, and



hasten to the palace of Holt, where the Princess Elizabeth is staying. Give her this letter from her royal father, and she will follow you hither. Tell her that I long to embrace her as a friend and a sister, and that I trust she will forgive me, if I cannot resign to her the whole heart of her King and father, but would still keep therein a place for myself. Hasten to the Palace of Holt, my lord, and bring with you the Princess Elizabeth."

END OF BOOK I.



BOOK THE SECOND.



The Chase.



CHAPTER I.

THE KING'S JESTER.

Two years had elapsed since the King's marriage, and still Katharine Parr had maintained herself in favour with her husband. As yet her enemies had not been able to succeed in their efforts to overthrow her, and raise a seventh queen to the Throne.

Katharine had always been cautious and circumspect. She had always kept her head and her heart cool; she had said to herself every morning, that this day might possibly be her last—that some thoughtless word or inconsiderate act might deprive her of her crown and of her life. For Henry's

fierce and cruel disposition seemed, like his bodily ailments, to increase each day. It needed but a trifle to excite him to the highest fury—to a fury which smote with a fatal blow the individual who had roused his anger.

It was this consciousness and this knowledge which had made the Queen circumspect. She did not yet wish to die. She loved life still—the more so, as it had hitherto afforded her so few pleasures: she still loved it because she hoped for so much happiness—for so many joys and delights, yet to come.

No. She did not yet wish to die; for she looked forward to life, of which she had already had but a dim foreshadowing in her dreams, and of which her trembling and anxious heart told her that Life was at length ready to wake within her, and to rouse her with eyes of sunny brightness from the winter sleep of her existence.

It was a beautiful day in spring. Katharine wished to avail herself of it, in order

to take an airing on horseback, and to forget for a few hours that she was a queen. She was anxious to enjoy a ride in the forest—to inhale the mild breezes of May—to hear the song of the wild birds—to gaze upon the verdant fields, and to breathe the balmy air of spring.


She wished to ride. No one suspected how much secret pleasure and hidden delight was contained in these words. No one suspected that for months she had looked forward to this excursion on horseback, albeit she had scarcely ventured to wish for it—just because it would be the fulfilment of her anxious desires.

She had already put on her riding habit; and the little red velvet hat, with long, white waving plume already adorned her beautiful head. Pacing up and down her apartment, she only awaited the return of her chamberlain, whom she had sent to the King, to know if he wished to see her before going out for her excursion.

Suddenly the door opened, and a strange apparition stood upon the threshold. This was a little shrivelled old man, wrapped in a garment of reddish purple silk, which was neatly adorned with puffs of many colours, and which, in its varied hues and tints, contrasted strangely with the white hair, and the dark, determined countenance of the old man.

"Ah! the king's jester," said Katharine, with a merry laugh. "Well, John Heywood, and what brings you here now? Have you any message from the King? or have you been playing some of your sly tricks again, and do you want me to take you under my protection?"

"No, your Majesty," replied John Heywood, gravely, "I have not been playing any foolish tricks, and I don't bring you any message from the King. I only bring you myself. Ah, my lady Queen, I see you are disposed to laugh, but I beg you will not forget for a moment that John Heywood is the king's jester, and that it does not become him to wear a serious



look and have grave thoughts like other men."

"Oh, I am aware you are not only the King's jester, but also a poet," said Katharine, with a gracious smile.

"Yes," he returned, "I am a poet, and for that reason it is quite right that I should wear this fool's cap—for Poets are all fools, and it would be better for them if they were taken and suspended from the next tree, rather than be allowed to run about in their mad ecstasy and prate of things in a way that must make them the scorn and derision of reasonable people. Yes Queen, I am a poet, and therefore I have donned the fool's livery that I wear, which puts me under the King's protection, and suffers me to tell him now and then strange truths which nobody else would have the hardihood to utter. But to-day, Queen, I come to you neither as a fool nor as a poet, but I come to embrace your knees and lay my thanks at your feet. I come to tell you that you have made John Heywood for ever your slave. Henceforth he

will lie at your door like a faithful dog, and watch you against every enemy and every insidious attack that might threaten to reach you. Night and day he will be ready at your service, and will take neither rest nor repose, when a command or a wish of yours is to be fulfilled."

And while he thus spoke with faltering voice, and his eyes filled with tears, he knelt down and bent his head at Katharine's feet.

"But what have I done to inspire you with such a feeling of gratitude?" said Katharine, astonished. "How have I deserved that you, the powerful favourite of the King, and dreaded by all, should devote yourself to my service?"

"What have you done?" he asked. "My liege Queen, you have saved my son from the scaffold. They had condemned him; yes, they had condemned this fine, noble, young man for having spoken with reverence of Sir Thomas More, for having said that that great and good man had done right in preferring to die, rather than forswear his convictions. Ah,

in our times it is such a mere trifle to be condemned to death—that even a thoughtless word is enough to do so. And this wretched lick-spittle parliament in its cringing baseness, always judges and condemns, for it knows that King Henry is always athirst for blood, and hankers for the stake and the gibbet. They had consequently condemned my son, and were it not for your Majesty's intercession they would have taken his life. But you, whom God has placed as a conciliating angel upon a royal throne dripping with blood; you, who daily put your life and your crown in jeopardy, for the safety and pardon of those unhappy beings who are condemned by fanaticism—you have also saved my son."

"What! Was the young man who was yesterday to be sent to the scaffold your son?"

"Yes; he was my son, my own son."


"And you did not tell the King so, nor intercede for him?"

"Had I done so, he would inevitably have

been lost. For you know the king is so sensitive upon his impartiality and his—virtue. Oh, had he known that Thomas was my son, he would have condemned him, in order to shew his people that Henry the Eighth everywhere strikes down the guilty, and punishes the offender, whatever may be his name, and whoever may intercede for him. Nay, even your Majesty's entreaties would not have saved him; for the high priest of the English Church would never have been able to pardon the circumstance that this poor young man was not the legitimate son of his father, that he had no right to bear his name, but that his mother was the wife of another, whom Thomas must call his father."

"Poor Heywood! Yes, I now understand. Certainly the king would never have pardoned this, and if he knew it, your son would have been irretrievably lost."

"You have saved him, my Queen. Do you now believe that I shall be eternally grateful to you?"



"I believe it," said the Queen, with a sweet and gracious smile, while she presented her hand for him to kiss. "I believe you, and I accept your services."

"And your Majesty will stand in need of them, for a storm is gathering over your head, and the thunder will soon roll, and the lightning flash."

"Oh, I'm not afraid of that," said Katharine, smiling. "If a storm should come, it will serve to clear and purify the atmosphere, and we know that after a hurricane frequently comes sunshine."

"You have a stout heart," said John Heywood, pensively.

"That is to say, I am not conscious of any guilt."

"But your enemies will impute guilt to you. Ah, when the question is to calumniate a fellow being and bring him to ruin, men, aye, and women too, have fertile imaginations—they are all poets."

"But you have just said that poets are

mad, and that they should be hung from the next tree. We shall therefore treat these slanderers as poets—that is all.”

“No that is not all,” said John Heywood, with energy; “for slanderers are like earth-worms. You may cut them in pieces, but instead of killing them, you will only multiply each, and give it several heads.”

“But what do they accuse me of?” exclaimed Katharine impatiently. “Is not my life blameless and patent to all men. Do I ever take pains to have any secrets? Is not my heart, on the contrary, like a house of glass, into which you all may look, and perceive that it is an unfruitful soil, and that not even one solitary little flower grows therein?”

“Exactly so; but your enemies will sow weeds in it, and make the King believe that they are the growth of a consuming love which has sprung up in your heart.”

“What? Accuse me of an unlawful passion?” asked Katharine, while her lips trembled visibly.

"As yet, I know not their plans, but I shall discover them. A conspiracy is brooding. Be, therefore, on your guard, my Queen. Trust nobody, for enemies always conceal themselves under the mask of hypocrisy and flattering words."

"If you know my enemies, name them to me," said Katharine impatiently. "Name them to me that I may guard against them."

"I am not here to accuse any one, but to bid you be watchful. I shall therefore be careful not to designate your enemies, but I will tell you who your friends are."

"Ah, then I have friends too," said Katharine, with a quiet and gratified smile.

"Yes, you have friends, and those friends are ready to shed their hearts' blood for you, if necessary."

"Oh, pray name them—name them," cried Katharine, trembling with joyful eagerness.

"I name first of all Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury. He is your true and faithful friend, upon whom you may safely rely.

He loves you as his Queen, and esteems you as the colleague whom God has sent him, in order here at the court of our most christian and most blood-thirsty sovereign, to bring the blessed work of the Reformation to a successful issue, and to cause the light of knowledge to illuminate this night of papal error and superstition. Build firmly upon Cranmer, for he is your surest and most stedfast support; and were he to fall, your own downfall would be the inevitable result."

"Yes, you are right," said the Queen, thoughtfully. "Cranmer is a noble and constant friend, and very often already he has taken my part with the King against the petty darts of my enemies, which do not indeed kill, but make the whole body sore and ill at ease."

"Protect him—as you value you own safety."

"Well, and the other friends?"

"I have given precedence to Cranmer, but now, my Queen, I name myself, as the second of your friends. As the Archbishop is your

staunch upholder, so will I be your watch-dog, and, believe me, while you have such a trusty supporter and such a faithful watch-dog, you are out of danger. Cranmer will warn you of every stumbling block that may cross your path, and I shall bark and bite at the enemies that lurk in ambush behind the thicket, in order to attack you unawares."

"I thank you sincerely," said Katharine, with cordiality. "Now pray continue."

"Continue?" said Heywood, with a sad smile.

"Yes, name some of my other friends."

"Ah, my Queen, it is much, very much, to have found two friends in life upon whom we can depend, and whose constancy is not determined by selfish motives. You are perhaps the only crowned head that can boast of such friends."

"I am a woman," said Katharine pensively, "and many ladies surround me, and daily vow their unchanging fidelity and attachment. And am I to consider all these as unworthy

the name of friends? Not even Lady Jane Douglas, whom I regard as one of my early friends, and in whom I confide as in a sister. Tell me, John Heywood, you who are said to know and discover whatever passes at this Court—tell me, is not Lady Jane Douglas my friend?"

John Heywood suddenly became grave and silent, and seemed lost in thought. At length, he opened his large lustrous eyes and looked inquiringly around the room, as if to convince himself that there was really no listener concealed, and advancing close to the Queen, he whispered:

"Trust her not—she is a papist and Gardiner is her friend."

"Ah, I suspected it," murmured Katharine sadly.

"But listen, my Queen,—do not let this suspicion escape you by word or look, or by the slightest intimation of any kind. Lull this viper in the belief that you think her harmless. Lull her to sleep, I say. She is a venomous and

deadly serpent that must not be provoked, lest she should bite you before you could suspect it. Only remember, Queen, not to confide to Lady Jane what you would not tell Gardiner and Lord Douglas. Oh, believe me, she is like the lion in the Doge's palace at Venice: the secrets which you confide to her will rise up in evidence against you at the bloody tribunal."

Katharine smiled and shook her head.

"You judge too severely, John Heywood. The religion to which she secretly adheres may possibly have estranged her heart from me, but she would never be so base as to betray me, or ally herself with my enemies. No, good John, you deceive yourself. It would be culpable in me to believe what you say. What a wicked and miserable world it would be if we dared not trust our most beloved and faithful friends."

"Aye, indeed the world is wicked and miserable, and we must distrust it, or else regard it as a merry pastime with which the devil

tickles our fancy. For me it is such a pastime, Queen, and therefore I became the King's jester, which at least affords me the privilege of spreading all the venom of human contempt over the crawling brood of Courtiers, and of telling the truth to those from whose tongues falsehood is always dripping like a honeycomb. Wise men and poets are the proper fools of our time ; and as I did not feel within me the vocation to be a king or a philosopher—a hangman or a victim, I became the King's Fool."

"Yes, that is to say, a dealer in epigrams whose caustic tongue makes all the court tremble."

"As I cannot send the culprits to the scaffold, like my royal master, I give them the sharp edge of my tongue ; and I assure your majesty you will stand sorely in need of this ally. Be on your guard, Queen. This very morning I heard the first growl of the thunder, and saw latent gleams of lightning in the eyes of Lady Jane. Trust her not : trust nobody

here but your friends, Cranmer and John Heywood."

"And you say that amongst all the brilliant ladies, and all the noble and chivalrous cavaliers at this court, the poor Queen has not a single friend, not a soul in whom she can confide? Oh, John Heywood, recollect yourself; have pity upon a helpless Queen; pray recollect yourself. Only you both—no other friend, say you?"

And the eyes of the Queen filled with tears, which she strove in vain to check.

John Heywood perceived it, and sighed deeply. Better, perhaps, than the Queen herself, he had read the thoughts of her heart, and knew its secret wounds. But he had compassion for her suffering, and wished to mitigate it as far as he could.

"Yes, I recollect," he murmured, in a low voice. "I now recollect you have a third friend at this Court."

"Ah! a third friend!" exclaimed Katharine, in a tone which betokened secret joy.

"Pray, who is it—who is he? I am quite impatient to know his name."

With a peculiar and inquiring glance, and with a pensive and expressive gaze, John Heywood looked into the glowing features of Katharine, and for a moment he dropped his head upon his breast, and sighed.

"Well, John, name this third friend of mine."

"Do you not know who it is, my Queen?" he asked, looking at her once more with a firm and fixed gaze. "Do you not know him? It is Thomas Seymour, Lord Sudley."

A gleam of sunshine seemed to pass over the countenance of Katherine, and she uttered a faint cry.

John Heywood resumed, in pensive tones:

"Queen, the sun shines directly upon your face, beware lest it dazzle your bright eyes. Repose in the shade, and—but, hark! here comes one who would be quite capable of affirming that the sunshine in your countenance was a conflagration."

At this moment the door opened, and Lady Jane Douglas appeared at the threshold. She cast a rapid, inquiring glance around the apartment, and a faint smile passed over her pale and beautiful features.

"Your Majesty," she said, "all is ready, and only awaits your commands. The Princess Elizabeth is in the ante-chamber, and your Master of the Horse already holds your stirrup."

"And the Chamberlain?" asked Katherine, slightly blushing; "has he no message for me from the King?"

"Yes," said the Earl of Surrey, entering. "His Majesty bids me tell the Queen that she may extend her ride as far as may be agreeable. This delightful weather deserves that the Queen of England should enjoy it, and enter into rivalry with the sun."

"Oh, the King is the most gallant of cavaliers," returned Katharine, with a smile of satisfaction. "Now, Jane, come, let us mount."

"Your Majesty will pardon me," said Lady

Jane, drawing back; "but I may not enjoy the favour of accompanying you to-day, as Lady Anne Ettersville is at present in attendance."

"Very well, Jane; another time, then. And you, my Lord Douglas, do you not join in our excursion?"

"The King has commanded my attendance in his closet, your Majesty."

"Now, only think. Here is a Queen, abandoned by all her friends," said Katharine, in a tone of lively raillery; while, with a light, elastic step, she crossed the saloon, and proceeded to the court-yard.

"There is something going on here which I must find out," muttered John Heywood, who, with the others, had left the room. "A mouse-trap has been laid, for the cats are staying at home, and are hungry for their prey."

Lady Jane, however, remained behind in the saloon with her father. They both advanced to the window, and looked down in

silence into the court-yard, where now the brilliant cavalcade of the Queen, with all her attendants, were mingled together.

Katharine had just mounted her horse. The noble animal, who knew his mistress, neighed loudly, while he pranced and snorted under his royal burden.

The Princess Elizabeth, who kept beside the Queen, uttered a cry of terror.

"Your Majesty will fall," she exclaimed. "Your steed is such a high-spirited and wayward animal."

"Oh, not at all," said Katharine, smiling. "Hector is a quiet horse, only he is somewhat like myself to-day. The fresh May breeze has made us both rather lively and mettlesome. Let us away then, my lords and ladies; our horses must put on their best speed to-day: we ride to Epping Forest."

And through the open gates of the court-yard rushed the goodly cavalcade. The Queen led the procession; on her right was the

Princess Elizabeth, on her left the master of the horse, Thomas Seymour.

When the Queen and her retinue had vanished, the father and daughter withdrew from the window, and exchanged a glance of peculiar significance.

"Well, Jane," said Lord Douglas, at length, "she is still Queen, and the King's health is daily growing more feeble and uncertain. It is quite time that we should present him with a seventh queen."


"Very soon, dear father; very soon."

"Does she love Henry Howard at last?"

"Yes, he loves her," said Lady Jane, while her features became deadly pale.

"I ask you if the Queen loves *him*?"

"She will love him," murmured Lady Jane; and then, suddenly recovering herself, she continued: "But it is not enough to make the Queen enamoured of the Earl of Surrey; it would doubtless be more effectual if the King could be inspired with a new passion.



Did you observe, my father, with what ardent looks the King yesterday regarded the Duchess of Richmond and myself?"

"Did I observe it? Why, all the Court noticed and spoke of it."

"Well, then, make the King feel desperately *ennuyé* to-day, and then bring him to me. He will find the Duchess of Richmond and myself together."

"An excellent idea! Come, Jane, you will yet be Henry's seventh wife."

"I shall at least overthrow Katharine Parr, for she is my rival, and I hate her," said Lady Jane, with glowing cheeks and flashing eyes.


"She has already been Queen long enough, and I have bowed before her. She shall now sink into the dust before me, and I will put my heel upon her neck!"

CHAPTER II.

THE EXCURSION.

THE morning was delightful. The dew was still upon the grass on the meadows, over which they rode before entering the thick of the forest, in the trees of which gay song birds piped their wild, melodious lays. They pressed forward along the course of a murmuring brook, and observed the herds of wild deer which flocked together in an open glade of the forest, as if, like the Queen and her retinue, they would listen to the warbling of the birds and the murmur of the rivulet.

Katharine felt an indescribable sensation of happiness, which made her bosom swell with




inward delight. To-day she was no longer the Queen, surrounded by dangers and by enemies; not the wife of an unloved and tyrannical husband—not the Queen, fettered by the trammels of etiquette. She was a free and happy woman, who, with hopeful yearning, looks forward smilingly to the future, and says to the fleeting hours: “Stay, stay, for ye are laden with delights!”

The happiness of the present hour was a visioned bliss, borrowed from the dreamland of the future. Ah, Katharine would joyfully have relinquished her crown if she could have rendered this hour enduring.

HE was at her side. He of whom John Heywood had told her, that he was one of her most steadfast and faithful friends. He was there. And if she did not venture to look at him often, or often to address him, yet she felt his proximity, and felt, too, that the glowing beams from his eyes fell upon her features like a consuming fire. No one could observe them, for the members of the court

rode at some distance in the rear, and before and around them was nothing but the love-breathing and smiling landscape, with the bright and beautiful sky above them.

Katharine had meanwhile forgotten that she was not quite alone, and that if Thomas Seymour rode at her left, the Princess Elizabeth rode at her right—this youthful girl of fourteen, who amidst fiery ordeals and the storms of ill-fortune, had suddenly sprung up to precocious womanhood, and whose heart had reached early maturity amidst the tears and bitter experience of her unhappy childhood. Elizabeth—the child in years, had nevertheless the strong and ardent feelings of a woman. Elizabeth—the rejected and disinherited Princess, had still inherited from her father his pride and ambition ; and when she looked at the Queen, and perceived the small crown studded with diamonds, which she wore over her velvet riding cap, she felt a keen inward pang, and thought to herself with bitter regret that this crown was destined



never to adorn her own brow, as the King had excluded her from the succession by a solemn Act of Parliament.

But the pain which she felt upon this subject had, for some weeks past, become somewhat mitigated. Another feeling had overpowered it. Elizabeth, who knew that she should not be a Queen or a Ruler, wished at least to enjoy the privileges of a woman. As she had been denied the chance of wearing a crown, she would at least enjoy the happiness of her sex ; if not a crown of gold, at least a myrtle wreath should deck her brow.

She had been early taught by experience to understand her own feelings, and she did not now shrink from examining with a firm and steady gaze, the sentiments which were uppermost in her heart.

Yes ;—She knew that she loved, and that Thomas Seymour was the object of her affection.

But on the part of the Earl—did he return her love? Did he understand the heart of

the young girl ? Had he recognised under her childish aspect the proud and passion-glowing woman ? Had he discovered the secrets of this timid and maidenly, and yet withal, this ardent and energetic spirit ?

Thomas Seymour had never yet betrayed a secret ; and what he had read, peradventure, in the eyes of the Princess, and what, perchance, he had said to her in the quiet shady walks of Hampton Court, or in the long dark corridors of Whitehall—nobody knew but themselves ; for Elizabeth had a strong masculine soul ; she needed no confidant to impart her secrets to ; and Thomas Seymour would have been apprehensive lest he should make for himself—like the immortal barber of Midas—a hole, and utter his secret therein ; for he knew well that if the reed should grow up and repeat his words, he would have to lay his head upon the block.

Poor Princess ! She did not suspect that the secret of the Earl and her own were not one and the same. She did not suspect that

if Thomas Seymour discovered her secret, he would only use it, perhaps, for the purpose of making it a glittering foil to his own secret.

Like Elizabeth, he too had seen the jewelled crown upon the brow of the young Queen, and he had observed how old and tottering the King was looking of late.

As he now rode beside the two Princesses, he felt his heart swell with proud exultation, while his thoughts were occupied alone with bold and ambitious projects.

Of these thoughts, however, his companions knew nothing. They were both too much taken up with their own musings; and while Katharine's eye, beaming with lustre, wandered to the scenes around her, the brow of the Princess became slightly clouded, and her keen glance was fixed upon Thomas Seymour with eager watchfulness.

She had observed those passionate glances which he sometimes directed towards the Queen; and the slight and almost impercep-

tible tremor of his voice in addressing Katharine, had not escaped her.

The Princess Elizabeth was jealous. She felt the first painful emotions of this terrible malady, which she had inherited from her father, and in the feverish outbreaks of which the King had sent two of his wives to the scaffold.

She was jealous—but not of the Queen ; or rather she did not think for a moment that the Queen could share or return Seymour's love. It never occurred to her to accuse Katharine of any complicity with the Earl. She was only jealous of the glances which he bestowed upon the Queen, and as she continued to observe those glances, she could not at the same time perceive in the eyes of her young step-mother the subdued fire which was kindled in them by Seymour's burning gaze, and which made her countenance to glow visibly.

But Thomas Seymour had perceived it, and

had he now been alone with Katharine, he would have flung himself at her feet, and have confided to her all the deep and dangerous secrets which he had so long concealed in his bosom, and he would have left her the choice either of sending him to the scaffold, or of accepting the love which he cherished towards her.

But behind them were the watchful, all-observant Courtiers—there was the Princess Elizabeth, who, had he ventured to speak to the Queen, would have divined, from his countenance, the import of the words which she might not overhear—for love has keen eyes and jealousy quick ears.

Katharine suspected nothing of the thoughts of her companions. She alone was happy. She alone gave herself up to the perfect enjoyment of the moment. She inhaled with serene delight the pure air around her, which was rendered fragrant by the wild flowers of the forest. She listened with eager attention to the soft murmurs of song, which

the wind breathed from amidst the trees. Her wishes did not extend beyond the present hour. She reposed in the consciousness and enjoyment of her lover's presence. Yes HE was there! What more was needful to make her happy?

Beyond the hour her wishes did not extend. She was only conscious how delightful it was thus to be at the side of her lover—to breathe the same air that he breathed, to look upon the same bright sky, the same flowers upon which his eye rested, and in which, at least, their eyes might meet in the kisses which were denied their lips.

But as they thus proceeded in silence, each wrapt up in their own thoughts, the aid which Thomas Seymour had prayed for came, in the shape of a huge fly.

At first this fly played and buzzed around the nose of the proud and fiery charger, which the Queen rode, and being observed by no one, it remained undisturbed in Hector's mane, and crept quietly to the top of the

noble steed's head, resting here and there, and sending its sting into the flesh of the restive animal, until he began to rear and neigh with pain.

But Katharine was a bold and skilful rider, and the uncurbed mettle of her steed only caused her pleasure, while it gave her Master of the Horse the opportunity of praising her coolness and dexterity.

Katharine received the compliments of her lover with a sweet smile. The fly, however, had crept along, until instigated by a malicious pleasure it fixed itself in the horse's ear.

The poor animal thus tormented, made a dart forward, but this stride instead of freeing him from his enemy, only caused the latter to sink more deeply into his ear, until the sting of the horse-fly became fixed in the fleshy part of the ear.

Goaded to madness by the pain, the fiery animal became uncontrollable, and spurning bit and bridle, suddenly plunged forward, and with furious speed darted along through the

glades of the forest, with the swiftness of an arrow.

"Help! help! for the Queen!" shouted the Master of the Horse; and setting spurs to the flanks of his courser, he flew after her with impetuous speed.

"Help for the Queen!" repeated the Princess Elizabeth, urging forward her horse and accompanied by the whole retinue.

But what is the speed of ever so quick but sober a horse, compared with the frantic fleetness of an infuriated courser, who mocks the rein, and springs forward foaming with a sense of unchecked freedom, like an impetuous wave lashed into fury by the storm.

Already the glades lay far behind them—far behind them the avenue which led through the forest;—over brooks and ditches, over plains and sand banks, dashed the enraged Hector with terrific speed.

Still the Queen kept her saddle firmly; her cheeks were colourless, and her lips trembled, but her eye was lustrous and clear; she had

not yet lost her self-possession, she was perfectly conscious of her danger. The shouts and cries which reached her at first, had died away for some time ; an endless wilderness and a death-like stillness now surrounded her. She heard nothing but the panting and snorting of her horse, and the sounds of his hoofs as he darted onward.

But at length the sounds of a well-beloved voice, fell upon her ear, and caused her to utter an exclamation of pleasure and delight.

This cry, however, terrified the furious animal afresh. Panting and exhausted, he had for a moment relaxed his furious speed, but he now pressed forward with renewed ardour and fleetness, as if urged upon the wings of the wind.

But nearer and nearer sounded the beloved voice ;—ever nearer the foot-fall of his horse.

They soon found themselves upon a large plain, entirely surrounded by the forest, and while the queen's horse took a circuitous

course, that of Seymour, obeying the rein of his rider, went straight across the plain, and was now close behind the queen.

“Only a moment longer! Hold your arms round the horse’s neck, lest you should be thrown by the shock, while I seize him by the bridle!” cried Seymour; and setting spurs to his horse, the latter darted forward with a wild yell.

This yell roused Hector to fresh fury, and panting for breath, he now plunged a-head into the thick of the forest.

“I hear his voice no longer,” murmured Katharine; and at length overcome by fear and by the dizzy course, and exhausted by her efforts, she closed her eyes, and her senses seemed to have left her.

But at this moment a strong and vigorous hand seized her horse’s bridle, until the animal, trembling and as it were abashed, at discovering that he had found his master, dropped his head.

“Saved! I am saved!” muttered Katharine, while breathless, and almost unconscious she rested her head on Seymour’s shoulder.

He lifted her from her saddle, and laid her upon the mossy turf, under an ancient oak. He then secured the horse to a branch of a tree, while Katharine, trembling and exhausted by her efforts, sank down to recover herself.

CHAPTER III.

THE DECLARATION.

THOMAS SEYMOUR speedily returned to Katharine. She still lay pale and motionless, and with her eyes closed.

He looked at her with a deep and ardent gaze, while he seemed to imbibe fresh draughts of love from the sight of this noble and beautiful woman—not suffering himself to reflect for a moment that she was his Queen.

At length then he was alone with her. At length after two years of patience, of torment, and dissimulation, God had granted him this happy hour, for which he had so long sighed in vain—which he had so long imagined un-

attainable. She was now beside him. She was now his own.

And had the entire court—had even Henry himself approached at this moment, Thomas Seymour would not have heeded them—he would not have been terrified.

His blood had mounted to his brain, and had overcome his reason; his heart, which in consequence of this furious chase, and of his anxiety for Katharine, still bounded and panted violently, did not suffer him to hear any voice but the voice of his passion—of his love.

He knelt down beside the Queen and gently seized her hand.

Perhaps it was this touch which roused her from her unconsciousness. She opened her eyes and looked vacantly around her.

"Where am I?" she asked in a faint accent.

Thomas Seymour pressed her hand to his lips. "You are with the most faithful and devoted of your servants, my Queen!"

Queen ! This word woke her up from her lethargy, and she raised herself into a sitting posture.

“ But where is my retinue ? Where is the Princess Elizabeth ? Where are all the eyes that are wont to guard and watch me ? Where are all the spies and listeners that accompany the Queen ? ”

“ They are far away from here,” replied Thomas Seymour, in a tone that betrayed his inward joy. “ They are far behind us, and will not overtake us for at least another hour. And now, my Queen, can you conceive what this hour is for me ? An hour of freedom, after an imprisonment of two years—an hour of happiness, after two long years of daily pain and daily torment ! ”

Katharine, who had smiled at first, now became grave and thoughtful. Her eyes rested upon her hunting cap, which had fallen from her head and lay beside her on the grass.

She pointed with trembling hand to the crown, and said gently :

“Do you know what that means, my lord?”

“Yes, Madam, I do ; but at this moment I no longer shrink from it with terror. There are moments when life hangs upon a precipice, and when we do not heed the abyss that lies yawning at our feet. Such a moment is the present. I know that this hour makes me a traitor, and may lead me to the scaffold, but yet I will not be silent. The fire which rages in my breast consumes me, and I must at length give it an outlet. My heart, which has for years burned as in a fiery furnace, but which is withal so vigorous that in the midst of its torments it evermore felt a sensation of bliss, must at length be destroyed or be appeased. Your Majesty must therefore deign to hear me.”

“No! no!” she exclaimed with almost painful emotion. “I will not—I dare not hear you. Remember, that I am the wife of Henry the Eighth, and that it is dangerous even to speak to you. Be silent, therefore my lord, —pray be silent, and let us proceed.”

She attempted to rise, but her own exhaustion, as well as Lord Seymour's gentle coercion compelled her to resume her seat.

"No, I will not be silent," he replied. "I will not be silent until I have told you all that glows and rages within me. The Queen of England may either pardon or condemn me, but she shall at least know that she is not for me the wife of Henry the Eighth, but the most charming and attractive—the noblest and the loveliest woman in England. I will tell her I do not for a moment remember that she is my Queen, or if I do so, it is only in order to execrate the King, who has been so presumptuous as to fix this dazzling and splendid jewel in his bloody crown."

Katharine, almost terrified, laid her hand upon Seymour's lips.

"Hold! unhappy man—hold!" she exclaimed. "Know you, that you are uttering words which would be your death warrant were any one to overhear them?"

"But no one hears me—no one but the

Queen and God, who is perhaps even more compassionate and merciful than the Queen herself. Accuse me therefore, Madam—accuse me if you will. Go and tell your King that Thomas Seymour is a traitor—that he dares to love the Queen; the King will send me to the scaffold, but I shall still esteem myself happy—for my death at least will be owing to and for you. O Queen—if I cannot live for you—surely it is a happy fate to meet death for your sake!”

Katharine listened to him with mute astonishment, while her senses seemed lost with intoxication. For her this language was wholly new, and it made her heart tremble with emotions of rapture; it filled her soul as if with melodies of magic spell, which lulled her into a blissful unconsciousness. She even forgot that she was the Queen—the wife of Henry—the jealous and bloodthirsty. She only knew that the man whom she had so long loved, now knelt at her side, and

that she listened with rapture to the music of his words—which were to her as nectar.

Thomas Seymour continued to urge his suit. He told her all that he had suffered, he told her that he had often resolved to die, in order at length to put an end to his torments, but that then a glance from her eyes, a word from her lips, had again given him the strength to live, and to endure still longer the tortures which were at once painful and full of delight.

“But now, Madam, my powers are exhausted, and you must either endow me with life or consign me to death. I am ready to mount the scaffold to-morrow, unless you suffer me to live—to live for you alone.

Katharine looked at him with astonishment and tremulous emotion. She encountered his proud and commanding glance, which almost caused her fear—but it was the bliss-yielding fear of the loving and submissive woman before the strong and imperious man.

“Do you know,” she said with a charming smile, “that you almost look as if you wished to command me to love you?”

“No, Madam,” he replied, proudly. “I cannot command you to love me, but I must charge you to tell me the truth—this I must require of you, for I am a man who has the right of demanding this of a woman. I have already said that for me you are not the Queen—for me you are only the loved and worshipped woman. This feeling has no connection with your kingdom, and in making this avowal of my love, I do not mean to convey that you would be lowering yourself in accepting it. For the true love of a man is always the most sacred gift which he can offer to a woman, and if even a beggar’s love be offered to a Queen she must feel herself honoured thereby. O, Queen, behold in me this beggar! I lie prostrate at your feet and lift my hands beseechingly to you, but I do not ask for alms—nor would I crave your pity and compassion, which

might perhaps tender me a gift in order to lessen my misery. No—I ask for yourself—I desire all or nothing. It will not suffice that you pardon my boldness and throw the veil of silence over my rash enterprise. I desire that you pronounce the decree, whether of my doom or of my bliss. I know you are generous and merciful, and even though you should scorn and not return my love—yet perhaps you will not betray me: perhaps you will spare me and be silent. But I repeat to you, Madam, I shall not accept this offering of your generosity. You shall either declare me to be a traitor, or exalt me to the heaven of bliss—for a traitor I am if you condemn my love, but a god among men if you return it.”

“And now, my Lord, do you know you are very cruel,” returned Katharine, with gentle reproach. “You wish that I should become either an accuser or an accomplice. You only leave me the choice of being the instrument of your doom, or of becoming a perjured and faithless wife—a wife who forgets



her sacred duties and her sworn vows, and who dishonours the crown which her husband has placed upon her head,—which dishonour the King would assuredly wash away with your blood and with mine.”

“Be it so!” exclaimed the Earl, with exultation. “Let my head fall at once, if you but love me! I shall then indeed be immortal, for a moment in your arms is an eternity of bliss!”

“But I have just observed, that not only your life but also my own is at stake. You know the severe and vindictive character of the King. Even mere suspicion would suffice to condemn me. Ah, if he only knew what we have here been saying, he would send me to the block as he did Katharine Howard, though I am not guilty as she was. Oh, I shudder to think of the scaffold, and yet, Lord Seymour, you would condemn me to that wretched fate, and then you say you love me!”

With a deep sigh, Thomas Seymour dropped his head pensively on his breast:

“ You have pronounced my sentence, gracious Lady, and though you are too generous to tell me the truth, I have divined it. No, you do not love me, for you see with a quick eye the danger which threatens you, and you shrink from it. No, you do not love me, for otherwise you would think of nothing but of love itself; danger would only serve to inspire you, and the sword which threatens would be unseen, or else you would seize its naked edge and say, ‘ What care I for death, since I am happy ! What matter the loss of life, since I have found undying felicity ! ’ Ah, Katharine, you have a cool head and a cold heart. God give you a continuance of both, for then you will pass through life quietly and without harm ; but you will still be a poor, cheerless, and deplorable being ; and when you die a royal crown will be laid upon your coffin, but Love will shed no tears over your grave. Farewell, Queen Katharine, and as you cannot love him, bestow at least your compassion upon the traitor, Thomas Seymour ! ”



Saying which, he bent down and embraced her feet. He then rose, and with a firm step advanced towards the tree to which the horses were bound.

But now Katharine sprang up, and rushing forward, seized his hand which held the bridle of his horse, and, breathless and trembling, said:

“What would you do? Whither are you going?”

“To the King, Madam.”

“And for what purpose?”

“To show him an arch-traitor, who has dared to love the Queen. You have taken away the life from my soul, and the King will take the life of my body. The latter is the less painful, and I shall thank him for it.”

Katharine uttered a cry of alarm, and drew him back with passionate violence to the spot where she had previously been resting.

“If you do what you threaten,” she exclaimed, with trembling lips and faltering voice, “You will kill me! Hear me!—

listen! At the very moment that you mount your horse to go to the King, I will mount mine too; not, however, to follow you—not to go back to London, but to rush headlong with my horse over yonder precipice. Oh, do not fear, you will not be accused as my murderer; it will be said that I have fallen over with my horse, and that the furious animal has caused my death!”

“I would advise your Majesty to be cautious, and to consider well what you are saying,” exclaimed Thomas Seymour, while his countenance brightened up, and his features became radiant with joy. “Consider that your words must either be a condemnation or an avowal. I will either die or secure your love. Not the love of a Queen, who thinks to bestow a favour upon her subject, in perhaps lifting him one day to rank with herself, but the love of a woman who bows her head with yielding humility, the while she accepts her beloved as her lord and husband! Oh, Katharine, take good heed! If you come

to me with the pride of a queen—if there be but one thought within you, which says that you favour your subject in taking him to your heart, then say no more, but let me go hence. I am proud and nobly born like yourself, and while love has vanquished me and flung me at your feet, still it shall not bow my head to the dust. But if you say, Katharine, that you love me, then will I consecrate to you my whole life. I will be at once your lord and your slave. I shall have no thought, no feeling, and no wish that will not be devoted to your service; and when I say that I will be your lord, I do not mean thereby that I shall not at the same time be constantly at your feet, and bow my head to the dust, and say to you, ‘Trample upon me, for I am your slave!’”

And while he thus spoke, he fell upon his knees and bowed his head at Katharine’s feet, while the noble and glowing expression of his countenance ravished her heart.

She stooped down, and raised him gently,

looking meanwhile, with an indescribable expression of happiness, into the depths of his beaming eyes.

“Do you love me?” asked Seymour, while he gently placed his arm around her slender waist, and rose from his kneeling posture.

“Yes, I love you,” she replied with a firm voice, and with a smile of ineffable happiness. “Yes, I love you, not as a Queen, but as a woman, and if this love should perchance bring us both to the scaffold, why then we shall at least die together, but only to meet again, and be reunited for ever in realms beyond the skies.”

“Oh, no, Katharine; think not of dying at present; think only of living; of the delightful and rapturous future which awaits us, and which smiles for our approach. Think of the days which will speedily come, when our love will require no further secrecy, no further concealment, but when we shall be able to proclaim it to all the world, and to shout our joy aloud with happy and exulting hearts. Yes, my

Katharine, let us look forward to the event which will at length loose the unnatural bonds which now bind you to this hoary tyrant, and then, when Henry is no more, you will be mine—mine with all your life and being; and then, instead of the proud royal diadem, your brow will be adorned with the bridal wreath. Swear this, Katharine. Vow solemnly that you will be mine as soon as you are set free by the King's death."

The Queen shuddered, and her cheek turned pale.

"Oh!" she sighed, "then death is our hope, and the scaffold, perhaps, our goal."

"Not so, my Katharine. Love is our hope, and happiness our goal. Think of life and of our future! Fulfil my request. Swear to me here in the sight of heaven, with God as our witness, that from the day on which death shall have delivered you from the thralldom of your marriage with the King, you will be mine—my spouse, my wife. Swear to me that disregarding etiquette, and in opposition to a tyrannical

custom, you will become the wife of Lord Seymour, even before the funeral knell shall have ceased for the King. We shall find a priest who will bless our love, and hallow the contract which we have made with each other this day and for ever. Promise that you will keep your faith and love for me until the wished-for day, and that you will never forget that my honour is thine, and thy happiness mine !”

“This I swear !” said Katharine, solemnly. “You may depend upon me at all times, and under all circumstances. Never will I harbour a thought that does not belong to you. I shall love you as Thomas Seymour deserves to be loved, that is with a devoted and confiding heart. It will be my pride to subject myself to you, and with a joyful heart I will serve and obey you, as your faithful, true, and dutiful wife.”

“I accept your vow,” said Seymour, in a like solemn tone. “And on my side I swear in return that I will honour and reverence

you as my Queen and mistress ! I swear to you that you will never find a more disinterested counsellor, a more constant husband, or a more valiant protector than I shall be to you. My life for my Queen, my heart for my mistress, will henceforth be my motto, and may I be forsaken by heaven and by you if I ever break this vow !”

“So be it !” said Katharine, with a bewitching smile.

Then they were both silent. It was that silence which is only known to love and happiness. That silence which is so rich in thoughts, and therefore, so poor in words.

The wind whispered softly through the trees, in the dark foliage of which here and there might be heard the shrill or mellow notes of some wild song-bird. The sun flung its emerald and golden rays athwart the soft, velvet sward and mossy turf, along the ground, which rising and falling in gentle undulations, formed miniature hills and valleys—while at

intervals appeared the graceful form of a stag or a young fawn, which looking around enquiringly, with its bright eyes, would suddenly disappear into the thicket on perceiving human beings in sight, with their horses encamped near them.

Suddenly the stillness was broken by the loud twang of the hunting horn, and in the distance confused cries and shouts became audible, which resounded through the recesses of the forest, and found an echo which was repeated a thousand fold.

The Queen raised her head with a sigh, from the shoulder of Lord Seymour. Her dream for the present was over; the angel with the fiery sword came to banish her from her paradise.

For she was no longer worthy of paradise; the fatal word was spoken, and while it had endowed her with love, it made her faithless to her vows.

The wife of Henry—his by the faith which

she pledged at the altar, had just plighted her word to another, and had given him the love which she owed her husband.

"It is past!" she said, with a sad smile. "These sounds recall me to my slavery. We must both resume our several characters. I must once more take the part of Queen."

"But swear to me again that you will never forget this hour—that you will always keep in memory the vows we have pledged to each other."

She looked at him with apparent surprise.

"What! can plighted faith and love be ever forgotten?"

"You will always remain true to me, Katharine?"

She smiled. "Now only imagine, my jealous lord—do I address such questions to you?"

"Ah, Queen, you know that you possess the magic spell which binds me to you for ever."

"Who knows," she returned musingly, while she directed her ardent gaze towards

heaven, and appeared to follow the fleeting silvery clouds that glided slowly aloft through the blue firmament.

And then her eye descending and resting on her lover, while her hand was laid on his shoulder, she said: "Love is like God himself—eternal, everlasting, and omnipresent. But we must believe in it, in order to feel its presence. We must trust in it, that we may become worthy of its blessings and rewards."

But the shouts and the clang of the horns were drawing nearer and nearer, and already the baying of the hounds and the sounds of the horses' hoofs were quite audible.

The earl had unfastened the horse, and led Hector, who was now tame and quiet as a lamb, to his mistress.

"Queen," said Thomas Seymour. "Here are two criminals who approach you. Hector is my fellow culprit, and had it not been for the fly, which as I now perceive from the poor animal's swollen ear, made him furious, I should still have been the most

wretched and unhappy man in your kingdom, whereas I am now the most fortunate and the most enviable."

The Queen made no reply, but she put her arms round the neck of the noble animal and kissed it fervently.

"From this day forth," said she, "I shall ride no other horse but Hector, and when he grows old, and unfit for service—"

"He shall be tended and nursed in the stables of Katharine, Countess of Sudley," interrupted Thomas Seymour, as he held the stirrup for the Queen and assisted her into her saddle.

They both rode forward in silence towards the point whence came the sound of voices and the shrill twang of the horns—both too much occupied with their own thoughts to interrupt the current thereof by an indifferent word.

"He loves me!" thought Katharine. "I am a happy and an enviable woman—for I have secured the love of Thomas Seymour."

"The Queen loves me!" said Thomas Seymour to himself with a proud, triumphant smile. "I shall therefore one day be Regent of England."

They had by this time reached the large, open plain which they had previously crossed, and over which now advanced the whole of the royal cavalcade, in the strangest confusion, with the Princess Elizabeth at its head.

"One thing more," whispered Katharine; "whenever you want a messenger to send to me, apply to John Heywood; he is a friend in whom I can trust."

And then she dashed forward towards the Princess Elizabeth, in order to relate to her the whole account of this adventure, and the fortunate manner in which she had been saved by her Master of the Horse.

Elizabeth meanwhile heard her with a look of sullen distraction, and when the Queen turned to the remainder of her retinue, and surrounded by her ladies and gentlemen received their congratulations, a slight nod from

the Princess brought Lord Seymour to her side.

She suffered her horse to canter forward a few paces, so that the Earl and herself were a little apart from the others, and were sure of not being overheard.

“My Lord,” she said, in a hasty and almost threatening tone; “you have often besought me in vain to grant you an interview, which I refused. You urged that you had many things to say to me, which would make it necessary to be alone. Well, my lord, we are now alone, and I am at length prepared to hear you.”

She ceased, and awaited his answer. But the Earl was taken unawares, and was mute with surprise. He only made her a profound and respectful bow, until he almost touched his horse’s neck.—“But no matter, I shall attend this rendezvous, even if it were only to dazzle Elizabeth’s eyes, so that she may not see, what she certainly never shall see—that’s all.”

The young Princess cast upon him an angry look, and said in a tone of sarcastic irony, "You understand well, my lord, the art of concealing your joy, and any one at seeing you might suppose—"

"That, at this dangerous Court, Thomas Seymour is discreet enough not to suffer his delight to be visible in his countenance," interrupted the Earl, in a subdued tone. "When, Princess, may I venture to see you, and where?"

"Wait this evening for the message which John Heywood will bring you," whispered Elizabeth, as she turned round to rejoin the Queen.

"John Heywood again!" murmured the Earl, "the confidant of both, and therefore my executioner if he likes."

CHAPTER IV.

LE ROI S'ENNUIE.

KING HENRY was alone in his closet. He had spent a few hours in the composition of a Book of Homilies which he was writing for his subjects, and which, by virtue of his dignity as Head of the Church, he wished to impose upon them as a substitute for the Bible.

He now laid down his pen, and glanced with infinite satisfaction over the pages he had written, which would afford his subjects a fresh proof of his paternal love and solicitude, and convince them that Henry the Eighth was not only the noblest and most

virtuous of monarchs, but also the wisest and most learned.

This reflection, however, was unable to cheer the King on the present occasion; perhaps because he had contemplated the subject too often, until it had lost its novelty. He felt restless and dejected, as if oppressed by an uneasy sense of solitude—there were so many secret and hidden voices in his heart, the whispers whereof he feared, and which he therefore sought always to drown. There were so many reminiscences of blood ever present to his mind, however often he strove to efface them with fresh blood. These thoughts the King abhorred, although he wore the air of never repenting what he had done, and never feeling any remorse of conscience for his deeds.

He suddenly rang the gold bell which stood beside him, and his countenance brightened up when he saw the door open, and the Earl of Douglas appear on the threshold.

“Oh! at length,” said Lord Douglas, who

well understood the expression of Henry features, "at length the King condescends to shew favour to his people."

"What! I shew favour?" asked the King, with astonishment. "And how is that, pray?"

"Because your Majesty at length takes rest from your labours, and thinks a little of your health, which is so precious, and so needful to the public weal. Because you remember, Sire, that the well-being of England consists alone in the welfare of her King; so that your Majesty must preserve your health, sound and robust, in order that your people may be so."

The King smiled with satisfaction. It never occurred to him to doubt the Earl's words. He thought it quite natural that the welfare of his subjects was centred in his own person, but still the assurance of this fact was ever a pleasing and grateful melody in his ears; for it appealed to his pride, and he

loved to hear the flattering strains repeated again and again by his courtiers.

The King, as we have said, smiled, but in this smile there was something unusual which did not escape Lord Douglas.

"He is in the condition of a hungry alligator," said Lord Douglas to himself "He is on the watch for prey, and he will only recover his cheerfulness and good humour, when he has tasted some human flesh and blood. Ah! well, fortunately, we have a large stock of that always on hand. It is the King's own and we shall give him some. But we must be cautious, and go to work prudently."

He approached the King, and kissed his hand.

"I kiss this hand," said the wily lord, "which to-day has been the instrument whereby the wisdom of the head has been poured forth on this thrice-blessed paper. I kiss this paper which will reveal and proclaim

to happy England the pure and unadulterated word of God; but still I would say, let it suffice for the present, Sire, and take rest, in order to remember that you are not only a sage but also a man."

"Yea, verily, a feeble tottering man!" sighed the King, whilst he attempted to rise with difficulty, and in doing so leant upon the arm of the Earl, with such force, that the latter almost gave way under the huge burthen.

"Tottering?" said Lord Douglas reproachfully. "Your Majesty moves with as much ease and freedom as a young man. And there was no need of my assistance to lift you up."

"Nevertheless we are growing old," said the King, who being to day affected with *ennui* was unusually sensitive and melancholy.

"Old!" repeated the courtier, "with these fire-flashing eyes, this unfurrowed brow, and this noble and serene countenance. No, your

Majesty—Kings, in common with the Gods, enjoy the privilege of never growing old.”

“And in that respect they resemble parrots to a hair,” said John Heywood, who at this moment entered the room. “I have a parrot which my great grand-father inherited from his great grand-father, who was the barber of Henry the Fourth, and which at the present day chatters with as much glibness as he did a hundred years back, ‘long live the King—long live this noble pattern of virtue, grace, beauty, and goodness, long live the King!’ That was the song my parrot sang a hundred years since, and he repeated it for Henry the Fifth, and Henry the Sixth, and for Henry the Seventh, and Henry the Eighth. And wonderful—the Kings have changed—but this song of praise has endured, and has never been anything but the pure and simple truth. Just like yours, my Lord Douglas. Your Majesty will allow him to tell the truth, for he is nearly related to my parrot, who always

calls him 'cousin,' and has taught him this immortal song of praise upon Kings."

The King laughed, while Lord Douglas cast a scornful and withering glance at John Heywood.

"He is an insolent knave," said the King, "is he not, Douglas?"

"He is a fool!" said the Earl with a supercilious shrug.

"Exactly so, and consequently I have often told you the truth, for it is well known that fools and children tell the truth. And my object in becoming a fool, was just in order that the King whom you all belie with flattery, may have some creature, besides his looking glass, to tell him the truth."

"Well, and what truth are you going to dish up for me to-day, John?"

"It is already dished up, Sire. Lay aside therefore your royal crown and your chief-priestship for a short time, and resolve to become a carnivorous animal for a brief space. There is no difficulty in being a King.

A man has only to be born of a Queen under a canopy, but it is a different thing to be a man with a good digestion. For this purpose one requires a sound stomach and a quiet conscience. Come, King Henry, come and let us see if you are not only a King, but also a man with a vigorous stomach."

And with a jocular grin, the jester took the King's arm and led him, with the Earl on the other side, into the dining-room.

The King, who was an extraordinary feeder, nodded silently to his suite to take their places at the table, after he had himself sunk into his gilded arm chair.

With a grave and solemn look, the King took from the hands of the chamberlain the ivory tablets on which were written the bill of fare for the day. The King's dinner was a serious and important matter. A large number of post-horses and messengers were continually engaged in fetching from the remotest parts of the kingdom and of Europe the most choice and dainty morsels for the

King's table. The list accordingly exhibited on this day, as it always did, the rarest and most recherché edibles, and whenever the King found one of his favourite dishes set down, he nodded his head approvingly, which always made the face of the Grand Master of the Ceremonies beam like rays of sunshine.

There were birds' nests from the Indies, and capons from Calcutta, besides truffles from Languedoc, which the poetical King Francis the First, had yesterday sent as a special mark of affection to his royal brother of England; the sparkling wine of Champagne, and the fiery wine of the Island of Cyprus, which the Republic of Venice had sent the King as a testimonial of high regard. There were, too, the hard Rhenish wines—lustrous as liquid gold, and yielding the fragrance of an entire bouquet—with which the North German Princes hoped to intoxicate the King, whom they wished to place at the head of their league. There were also huge pasties of par-

tridges, which the Duke of Burgundy had sent, and the luscious fruits of the South and of the Spanish main, with which the Emperor Charles the Fifth furnished the table of the King of England. For it was well known that in order to win the favour of the English monarch, his appetite must needs first be appeased, and his palate tickled, before his head or his heart could be won over.

All these delicacies, however, did not suffice on the present occasion to impart to the King that happy and cheerful humour, which he generally evinced when he sat down to table. He smiled pensively at John Heywood's jocular sallies and witty sarcasms, and a cloud hung upon his brow. The King needed specially the presence of the ladies to put him in a cheerful mood,—he needed them, as the hunter needs the stag in order to enjoy the pleasures of the chase,—pleasures which consist in this, that the defenceless are driven to death, and war declared against the peaceful and innocent.

The wily courtier, Lord Douglas, readily perceived the troubled temper of the King, and understood the secret cause of his sighs and gloomy looks. He had ardently hoped for this, and he resolved to take advantage of it in favour of his daughter, and to the prejudice of the Queen.

"Sire," he said, "I am just on the point of becoming a traitor, and of accusing my King of injustice."

The King glanced at him with his flashing eyes, while he laid his hand, sparkling with brilliants, upon the golden goblet filled with Rhenish wine, that stood before him.

"Injustice! Me, your King?" he asked, with a thick utterance.

"Yes, of an injustice, inasmuch as you are for me the visible representative of God upon earth. I would accuse the Almighty if he were one day to deprive me of the sun's brightness and splendour, or of the fragrance of his flowers; for as we children of men are accustomed to enjoy these delights, we have ac-

quired an undoubted claim to them in perpetuity. I therefore accuse you, Sire, of having withdrawn from us the embodied essence of the flowers, and the incarnate light of the Sun itself—for you have been so cruel as to send the Queen to Epping Forest.”

“Not so—the Queen wished to ride,” said Henry pettishly. “The spring weather attracted her, and as unfortunately I do not possess that highest of God’s attributes—omnipresence—I must needs dispense with her society for once. There is no longer a horse able to carry the King of England.”

“Yet there is Pegasus, Sire, and your Majesty knows so well how to manage him. But how, Sire—the Queen wished to ride, though by doing so she would be deprived of your presence? Ah, how cold and selfish are the hearts of women! If I were a woman I would never leave your side; I would covet no greater happiness than to be near you, and listen to the lofty wisdom that flows from your heaven-inspired lips. Were I a woman—”

“My lord, I think your wish is already gratified,” interrupted John Heywood, with assumed gravity. “At least your lordship gives me quite the idea of an old woman.”

All the company laughed. But the King did not even smile: he remained serious and wore a sullen look of abstraction.

“It is true,” he muttered to himself, “she seemed not only glad, but even elated at this excursion, and her eyes shone with a fire that I have rarely seen. There must be some peculiar circumstance connected with this ride to Epping Forest. Who accompanied the Queen?”

“The Princess Elizabeth,” said John Heywood, who had heard all, and who had clearly perceived the shaft which the Earl had aimed at the Queen. “The Princess Elizabeth, her faithful and devoted friend, who never leaves her side—and also her ladies, who, like the dragon in the fable, watch over the beautiful princess.”

“Who is there besides in the Queen’s retinue?” asked Henry morosely.

"Her Master of the Horse, Lord Sudley," replied Douglas, "and—"

"That was quite a superfluous observation," interrupted John Heywood—"it is a matter of course, that the Master of the Horse should accompany the Queen. It is as much his duty to do so as it is yours to sing the song of your cousin, my parrot."

"He is right. Thomas Seymour must accompany her," said the King, hastily—"that is my will and pleasure. Thomas Seymour is a faithful servant, and he has inherited that quality from his sister Jane, my much beloved Queen who rests with God. Thomas Seymour is devoted to his King with unwavering fidelity."

"The time is not yet ripe to assail the Seymour party," thought the Earl. "The King is still favourable to them, and he will therefore be hostile to their enemies. Let us, accordingly begin our attack against Henry Howard—that is to say, against the Queen."

"Who accompanied the Queen besides?" repeated Henry, draining the goblet at a

draught, as if he wished thereby to cool the fire which was already kindling up within him. But the fiery Rhine wine instead of cooling—only heated him still more; it fanned like a hurricane the flame which was burning in his jealous breast, until it rose to his head, and made his brain glow like his heart.

“Who else accompanied her?” said Lord Douglas, with an air of *nonchalance*. “Well, I think it was the Queen’s Chamberlain—the Earl of Surrey.”

The King knit his brows. The lion had scented his prey.

“The Queen’s Chamberlain is *not* in the retinue!” said John Heywood, with earnest vehemence.

“He is not?” cried Lord Douglas. “Poor Lord Surrey!—that will make him very sad.”

“And why do you think it will make him sad?” demanded the King, in a voice that resembled the rumbling of distant thunder.

“Because Lord Surrey is accustomed, Sire, to live in the sunshine of royal favour—be-

cause he resembles that flower that always turns its face towards the sun and receives from it life and colour and splendour."

"Let him take care that the sun does not scorch him!" murmured the king.

"My lord," said John Heywood, "you should use a pair of spectacles to help you to see better. This time you have confounded the sun with one of its satellites. The Earl of Surrey is far too prudent a man to venture to bask in the sun, and so dazzle his eyes and affect his brain. He is content with worshipping one of the planets that surround the sun."

"What does the fool mean?" said Lord Douglas, with a scornful smile.

"The wise man means you to understand that you have this time confounded your daughter with the Queen," replied John Heywood, laying a stress upon each word; "and that it has happened to you like many great astronomers, to mistake a—"

Lord Douglas cast an angry and scornful

glance at John Heywood, which the latter returned with a look of stern defiance.

Their eyes became fixed upon each other, and they each read in the eyes of the other, the hatred and animosity which was fermenting in their hearts. They both knew that from this hour forth they had sworn an implacable and deadly animosity against each other.

Of this silent but most significant scene, the King had observed nothing. He hung his head, brooding gloomily upon the words of Lord Douglas, and the storm-clouds which gathered on his brow, were becoming more dense and murky each moment.

With a violent effort he raised himself from his seat, and this time he required no helping hand to stand upright. Anger was the powerful lever which lifted him up.

The courtiers rose silently from their seats, and nobody but John Heywood observed the glance of mutual understanding which Lord Douglas exchanged with Gardiner, Bishop

of Winchester, and Wriothesley the Chancellor.

"Ah! Why is Cranmer not here?" said John Heywood to himself. "I see the three tiger-cats prowling about, consequently, there is prey somewhere to be swallowed. Well, at all events, I shall keep my ears wide open, so that I can hear their purring and miauling."

"Dinner is over, my lords," said the king, hastily, and the gentlemen of the court and the lords in waiting withdrew in silence to the ante-chamber.

Only Lord Douglas, Gardiner, and Wriothesley remained behind, while John Heywood had glided, unperceived, into the king's closet, and there hid himself behind the gold-brocaded screen which covered the door leading from the king's study into the outer ante-room.

"My lords," said the king, "you will accompany me to my closet. As time hangs heavily on our hands, it will be most advisable to divert ourself by taking note of what con-

cerns the welfare of our beloved subjects. Follow me therefore: we will hold a Privy Council."

"Lord, Douglas, your arm." And whilst the king, leaning upon the arm of his courtier, proceeded slowly towards the cabinet, at the entrance of which the Chancellor and the Bishop of Winchester awaited him, he asked quietly :

"You say that Henry Howard dares frequently to press into the society of the Queen?"

"Sire: I did not say that. I only meant that he was continually to be seen in the vicinity of the queen."

"Oh; you meant, perhaps, that she encouraged him to do so," said the king, grinding his teeth.

"Sire: I hold the Queen to be a noble and a faithful wife."

"And if you thought otherwise, I should feel disposed to lay your head at your feet," returned the king, in whose countenance the

first flash of the thunder-cloud seeking a vent began to burst forth.

"My head belongs to the King," said Lord Douglas, submissively. "Let his Majesty do with it as he pleases."

"But Howard? Do you mean, then, that Henry Howard loves the Queen?"

"Yes, Sire, I venture to maintain that he does."

"Well then, by God's Mother, I will crush the reptile under my feet. I will serve him as I did his sister!" exclaimed Henry, with passionate vehemence. "The Howards are a dangerous, an ambitious, and a hypocritical race."

"A race which never forgets that a daughter of their house has sat upon your throne."

"But they shall forget it!" exclaimed the King, "even if I were obliged to wash away the proud and arrogant thought with their heart's blood. It seems they have not already had proof enough in the example of their sister, how I can punish faithlessness and

treason. This insolent race wants still another proof. If so they shall have it. Only furnish me with the means, Douglas—give me the smallest hook that I can fix in the flesh of these Howards, and I tell you that with this little hook I will land them on the scaffold. Only give me proofs of the audacious love of the Earl, and I promise to grant you as a reward whatever you ask.”

“Sire, I will undertake to furnish the proofs you require.”

“When?”

“Within four days, Sire,—at the grand tournament of Poets, which you have commanded in honour of the Queen’s birthday.”

“Thanks, Douglas, thanks,” said the King, with a smile of satisfaction. “In four days you will have rid me of the troublesome race of the Howards.”

“But, Sire, if I cannot give the proofs you require, without accusing another person?”

The King who was about to enter the door of his closet, stood still and looked at the

Earl with a fixed gaze. Then he replied, with a grim and sinister smile: "You mean the Queen? Well, if she is guilty, I shall punish her! God has placed his sword in my hand—that I may wield it to his honour and to the terror of men. If the Queen has sinned she shall suffer. Furnish me with the proofs of Howard's guilt, and be not concerned, if in procuring them, we should discover the guilt of others. We will not shrink back faint-hearted, but let justice take its course!"

END OF VOL I.





